

A STUDY OF THE CONDITION OF "GOOD WORK" IN EDUCATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP IN IOWA

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Doctor of Education

by G. Douglas Stilwell  
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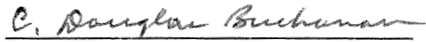
A Study of the Condition of "Good Work" in Educational Leadership in Iowa


By G. Douglas Stilwell

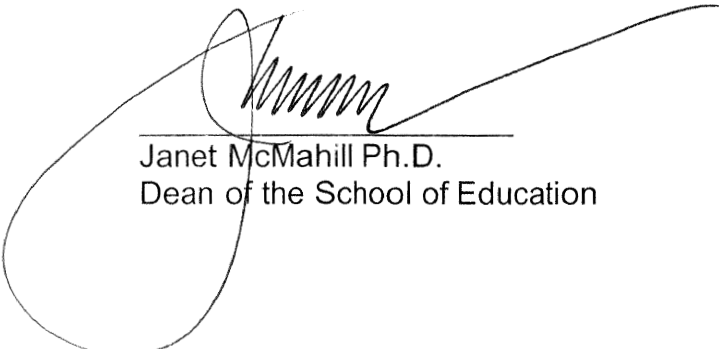
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# A STUDY OF THE CONDITION OF "GOOD WORK" IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN IOWA

An abstract of a Dissertation by  
G. Douglas Stilwell  
December 2004  
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Chair: Sally Beisser

Extending the research of Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon (2001) in the fields of genetics and journalism and pursued because "we are convinced that the challenge of good work confronts every professional today" (p. ix), this study focuses on the question of what it means to carry out good work – "work that is both excellent in quality and socially responsible - at a time of constant change" (p. ix) in the field of educational leadership.

This study is qualitative in nature, combining features from the traditions of grounded theory and ethnography to provide a thick and rich description of good work in educational leadership in Iowa. One central research question, "What does it mean to carry out 'good work' in the professional realm of educational leadership in Iowa today?" guided the study. Over 120 pages of data were collected from semi-structured interviews of 10 high-profile, influential educational leaders from the state of Iowa. These leaders were specifically selected through a collaborative identification process with School Administrators of Iowa. Data analysis and verification included searching for themes through the processes of open, axial, and selective coding; triangulation; member checks; and interpreting the data to make sense of the findings. The resulting findings were written in an ethnographic narrative style to present a meaningful, contextual description of the discoveries and to provide the opportunity for authorial "voice."

This study found that good work (defined in terms of excellence and ethics) exists for these 10 educational leaders through the building of relationships, leadership, focusing on student need and achievement, moral purpose, decision-making, transparency of processes, and accountability. Their efforts to carry out good work are supported by professional organizations, strong relationships, influential individuals, high expectations, effective communication, integrated personal belief systems, and personal efficacy. Efforts to do good work are challenged by resource limitations, political mandates and accountability systems, systemic and societal changes, the subtle shift to a market based educational system, and the continual struggle to determine the "greater good" in any given circumstance.

Fundamentally, those who choose educational leadership as a profession do so for a greater good; to make a difference in the lives of children, subsequently shaping the future of our society and even the world. It is the conclusion of this study, that despite the increasing challenges, prominent educational leaders in Iowa are engaging in high quality work in a socially responsible manner. As a result, the perception prevails that the future of educational leadership is an optimistic one.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Introduction to Good Work*

Through Drake's Doctoral 302 Advanced Seminar entitled Individual and Ethical Responsibilities in Learning Communities, during the spring academic semester of 2003, I was introduced to the collaborative work of psychologists and authors Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon, who began a collaborative venture in 1994 that was to span seven years and result in the publication of a book entitled *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet*. While each individual is best known for a different expertise in the field of psychology (Gardner: cognitive psychology, Csikszentmihalyi: social psychology, and Damon: developmental psychology), each had "envisioned projects [that] were in many respects very similar" (Gardner et al., 2001, p. viii). Each "had begun to struggle with the relationship between high-level performance and social responsibility" (p. viii).

Their research was conceived and developed around a set of initial and fundamental questions including "Is it true that most creative scientists are selfish and ambitious, unconcerned with the common good? Why is it that experts primarily teach *techniques* to young professionals while ignoring the values that have sustained the quest of so many creative geniuses? Is the impact of science, technology, and communication predetermined – for good or ill – or do we have some control over it?" (Gardner et al., 2001, p. viii). The research, on a

very fundamental level, was focused on “what it means to carry out ‘good work’ – work that is both excellent in quality and socially responsible – at a time of constant change” (p. ix).

*Good Work* concentrated on the professions of genetics and journalism, “two professions in which the practitioners are grappling with how to do top-quality, socially responsible work at a time of extremely rapid change” (Gardner et al., 2001, p. ix). These professions were selected over others because the authors felt it significant that “one [is] poised to control the composition of our bodies, [while] the other with the potential to control the content of our minds” (p. ix). The authors have created historical and contemporary descriptions of each profession, cited examples of excellence and ethics and the lack thereof, and uncovered the current and potential obstacles and supports to advance and merge excellence and ethics in each profession respectively.

Their findings also provide a comparison between the professions, both in terms of excellence and ethics. According to the research, the relatively contemporary field of genetics “emerges at the turn of the millennium as a profession in remarkably good shape. Leaders and midlevel practitioners concur about the primary missions, the most important standards, and the principal personal goals and profiles of responsibility” (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 90). However, the field of journalism has evolved from newspapers owned by wealthy families “who felt close ties to their communities and who believed that journalistic integrity was good for business” (p. 135), to a profession in which the “changes [including an ever-growing emphasis on profits and market

share]...have thrown the news profession into what many observers are describing as a 'state of crisis'" (p. 151).

As one broad theme *Good Work*, among other things, provides evidence that professions are in a constant state of change in relation to the condition of "good work" and are impacted by internal and external forces. While considered being in a "golden age," the authors tell us there appear to be "storm clouds" brewing in genetics. Influences including the market economy and changes from within the field itself including competitiveness and the desire to control information create ethical dilemmas that threaten the integrity of the field. On the other hand, while at a "pivotal moment in which the scales are hanging in precarious balance" (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 152), the field of journalism is supported by journalists who "today still profess allegiance to their domain's traditional standards – in particular, truthfulness and fairness" (p. 171).

This study, in nature and methodology, extended the research from *Good Work*. It investigated attributes, supports, and challenges to determine the current condition and future of good work in educational leadership from the perspective of ten high-profile Iowa educational leaders.

### *Qualitative Research*

The desire to conduct a qualitative study was piqued during Drake's DOC 306, Qualitative Research Methods course, during the 2003 summer academic semester. As a person who thrives on meaning in and through my work, the opportunity to research and write about a topic of interest in a way where multiple meanings could be woven through a thick and rich text was very appealing. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) write, "'meaning' is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. People who use this approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives" (p. 7). Qualitative research also allows and acknowledges the researcher as a part of the study. In the case of an ethnographic study, Boyle (1994) writes that "ethnography has a reflexive character, which implies that the researcher is a part of the world that she or he studies and is affected by it" (p. 165).

The process of conducting qualitative research is perhaps best described by thinking of it metaphorically as a river, rather than a road. Writer Michael Crummey (1996) descriptively illustrates the inductive and constructive nature of qualitative research in a poem entitled "Rivers/Roads":

Consider the earnestness of pavement  
its dark elegant sheen after rain,  
its insistence on leading you somewhere

A highway wants to own the landscape,  
it sections prairies into neat squares

swallows mile after mile of countryside  
to connect the dots of cities and towns  
to make sense of things

A river is less opinionated  
less predictable  
It never argues with gravity  
its history is a series of delicate negotiations with  
time and geography

Wet your feet all you want  
Heracitus says,  
it's never the same river you remember;  
a road repeats itself incessantly  
obsessed with its own small truth,  
it wants you to believe in something particular

The destination you have in mind when you set out  
is nowhere you have ever been;  
where you finally arrive depends on  
how you get there,  
by river or by road



## *Rationale and Importance*

*Good Work*, as a published document, resulted from research of the Good Work Project, during which teams of investigators researched “the ways in which leading professionals in a variety of domains carry out good work” (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 257). Through a process of intensive interviews, other domains were investigated, including journalism, genetics, business, jazz music, theater, philanthropy, and higher education (p. 257).

Initially, I was not particularly enamored with *Good Work*. I was concerned at the start that understanding the technical aspects of genetics would prove problematic and that both genetics and journalism would be too dry to capture my interest. However, I found that as I read further into the book and came to its end, that indeed a fire had been lit inside of me. While written in the context of genetics and journalism, at a deeper level *Good Work* was not really about those topics. What I came to discover was that at a deeper more fundamental level the book was truly about, as the authors stated, what it meant to do quality work in a socially responsible manner.

Finding the *Good Work* research to be compelling on multiple levels, I subsequently began to speculate how my own profession, educational leadership, would measure up against the standards of excellence and ethics, given the issues and challenges that surrounds education in contemporary America. Acknowledgement of my own thoughts and wonderings revealed how important I believe it to be for educational leaders to engage in “good work.”

At the most fundamental level as educational leaders I believe we are compelled to continually strive towards achieving excellence in a socially responsible manner. Given the magnitude of influence on the millions of children who attend school on a daily basis, American educational leaders, in as what shall be described later as “leverage,” are imbued with a responsibility, in my opinion, to all those with whom we work including students, parents, community and staff to provide top-quality effective leadership. Daily, each leader is accountable to others and also oneself regarding the quality and meaningfulness of our work. It is my hope that this investigation will add to the body of research in educational leadership. Additionally, I hope it can stimulate educational leaders to consider the status of their good work through the quality and ethics of their efforts as they strive daily to serve their communities and provide quality educational experiences for their students.

Beyond the broader professional implications, this topic has personally significant meaning for me, relating to an interest I have in the area of trust building; and I have taken it to heart at a deeply personal level. Recently, I have come to realize that an anecdote from 22 years in my past has had more than a short-term impact on my beliefs, continuing to influence me to this day. As a second year teacher in 1982, frustrated with education, I received a letter from my grandfather who as a community leader served in various roles, including over 20 years as a member of his community’s school board. In a portion of this letter, as a response to my letter of frustration, and meant to inspire me, reflecting on his thoughts and experience as an educational leader, he wrote

“education is the bulwark not just of our country but of the entire world. It needs the help of educated, dedicated, moral individuals willing to give of themselves, their time, and their talents in the universal job of providing the best education for all young men and women” (E.H. Stilwell, personal communication, May, 1982). That letter, because of the leadership position I hold, is more significant to me today than it was 22 years ago. Still in my possession, this letter reminds me of the ethical and professional obligation we have as educators to carry out “good work.”

One might surmise it may be more than coincidental, that over twenty years after the writing of that letter, my grandfather’s thoughts return to me, conveying and supporting both the importance and necessity for “good work” from those involved in the field of education at a time when I am studying “good work” in educational leadership. In his book entitled *Synchronicity*, Joseph Jaworski (1998) supports the notion that there may be more to coincidence than sheer coincidence.

Arthur Koestler, paraphrasing Jung defines ‘synchronicity’ as “the seemingly accidental meeting of two unrelated causal chains in a coincidental event which appears both highly improbable and highly significant.” The people who come to you are the very people you need in relation to your commitment. Doors open, a sense of flow develops, and you find you are acting in a coherent field of people who may not even be aware of one another. You are not acting individually any longer, but out of the unfolding generative order” (p. 185).

While this concept of “synchronicity” may well be a topic for another study, it certainly seems as though there is a possibility that it is at work in my current endeavor.

My own studies and graduate work in educational leadership over the course of 13 years, including the current pursuit of a doctorate in educational leadership at Drake University, have led me to the broad conclusion that effective leadership is the key leverage point in creating and maintaining quality schools and learning opportunities for our youth. The principle of leverage, from a systems dynamicist’s perspective may be described as “a change which – with a minimum of effort that would lead to lasting, significant improvement” (Senge, 1990, p. 65). One of the world’s greatest mathematicians, Archimedes, illustrated the power of leverage when he once said that if he had a lever long enough, single-handedly he could move the world. If then leaders are the holders of these “key leverage” points, subsequently influencing the entire educational system and ultimately the millions of learners who are a part of the system, one might argue that it is imperative to understand if and how educational leaders carry out high quality and socially responsible (“good”) work.

Why study good work? The authors made a deeply profound statement in the form of three questions towards the beginning of the book that addresses and answers this question at an acutely fundamental level, with broad implications to individuals and society as a whole:

“What constitutes good work?” is a question all of us must ask again and again. How can we live up to the demands of our job and the expectations

of society without denying the needs of our personal identities? What resources can we draw on, as powerful, often contradictory forces cause stress, doubt, and guilt to creep into the performance of our work? (Gardner et al., pp. 34-35).

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand the current condition of “good work” in educational leadership in Iowa from the perspective of ten prominent educational leaders in the state of Iowa. For as Gardner et al. (2001) state, “we are convinced that the challenge of ‘good work’ confronts every professional today” (p. ix). While issues impacting “good work” will be explored and analyzed, through in-depth interviews, this study will focus on “what happens ‘inside the head’ of engaged professionals” (p. 13) and determine not only, “how people make sense of their situations, but also which plans and actions they ultimately pursue and why” (p. 13). It is my hope to also study what Thomas Sergiovanni (1992) would refer to as the “heart” of leadership as I examine the ethics and conscience of our educational leaders. For as Sergiovanni (1992) tells us in his book *Moral Leadership*, it is the heart that informs the head (intellect) of leadership, which in turn informs the hand (action).

### *Guiding Questions*

#### *Central research question*

The development of a research question is an integral aspect of the research study. “Contrast[ed] to quantitative questions that ask why and look for a comparison of groups (e.g., Is Group 1 better at something than Group 2?) or a

relationship between variables, with the intent of establishing an association, relationship, or cause and effect" (Creswell, 1998, p. 17), qualitative research questions "are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 2).

Mason (1996) describes the importance of the development of the research question as a process of designing the research and advocates to view research as an "intellectual puzzle" (p. 14) because the process "focuses your mind on research questions" (Mason, 1996, p. 14). Mason believes that "a research question is a question which the research is designed to address (rather than, for example, a question which an interviewer might ask an interviewee) and, taken together, your research questions should express the essence of your enquiry" (Mason, 1996, p. 15). The development of the questions is not viewed merely as a perfunctory step in the research process. Rather, it is the research questions that get at the heart of the intellectual puzzle and "are those questions to which you as a researcher really want to know the answers and in that sense are the formal expression of your intellectual puzzle" (Mason, 1996, p. 16). Stated another way from science fiction thriller *The Matrix* (1999), "It's the question that drives us."

Creswell (1998) refers to a "central research question" (p. 99) and recommends "that a researcher reduce her or his entire study to a single, overarching question and several subquestions (p. 99). To reach this central question Creswell "ask[s] qualitative researchers to state the broadest question

they could possibly pose about their studies” (p. 100). Aligning with the tradition of qualitative research, “these questions are open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional; restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms, start with words such as ‘what’ or ‘how’ rather than ‘why’; and are few in number (five to seven)” (p. 100).

This study has attempted to replicate, when feasible and appropriate, the research methodology from *Good Work*. “Replication studies need not literally repeat the conditions of a previous study. The replication can duplicate critical elements and also extend the inquiry into new domains” (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 40). *Good Work* provides a complex, thick and rich description of the state of excellence and ethics in genetics and journalism. Seeking the same end, the central question guiding this study has been, “What does it mean to carry out ‘good work’ in the professional realm of educational leadership in Iowa today?”

*Sub questions.*

“An author typically presents a small number of subquestions that follow the central question” (Creswell, 1998, p. 101). The following subquestions fall into two categories: issue and topical. “According to Stake (1995), **issue subquestions** address the major concerns and perplexities to be resolved” (Creswell, 1998, p. 101). Issue subquestions for this study included:

1. What does it mean to do excellent work as an educational leader?
2. What does it mean to do ethical work as an educational leader?
3. What does the future hold for good work in educational leadership?

**“Topical subquestions** cover the anticipated needs for information”

(Creswell, 1998, p. 101). The following subquestions “call for information needed”

(Creswell, 1998, p. 101) to further describe conditions impacting “good work” in educational leadership:

1. How is excellence encouraged and supported?
2. What challenges a leader's ability to engage in excellent work?
3. How is ethical work encouraged and supported?
4. What issues or circumstances challenge the ethical behaviors of educational leaders?



## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Overview*

A literature review “involves locating, reading, and evaluating reports of research as well as reports of casual observation and opinion that are related to the individual’s planned research project” (Borg & Gall, 1989, p.114). Its purpose “is to help you develop a thorough understanding and insight into previous work and the trends that have emerged” (p. 116). While providing a thorough background on a particular topic and access to data used in previous research, this type of review also helps in “both limiting and more clearly defining” (p. 117) one’s research.

Since qualitative research is constructive in nature, there are differing opinions as to the need for and degree of literature review in qualitative studies. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) advocate to “begin exploring the literature while you are in the field” (p. 157) because “after you have been in the field for a while, going through the substantive literature in the area you are studying will enhance analysis” (p. 157). However, with that said, I believe it is important to demonstrate fundamental understandings of the concepts that define and are foundational to understanding the topic of “good work.”

Gardner et al. (2001) fundamentally define “good work” as “work that is both excellent in quality and socially responsible” (p. ix). As I have analyzed these two fundamental attributes, it has resulted in two main areas of study for the literature review: excellence and ethics. This section, then, will provide a

review of literature pertinent to providing a rudimentary understanding of these two concepts.

### *Ethics*

Ethics is a significant aspect of doing “good work” in any profession. Gardner et al. (2001) have stated in their work that “there has to be an ethical dimension reassuring people that the skills will not be used against the common interest and solely for the practioners’ advantage” (p. 23). One example of professional ethics is the oath of ethical behavior which is sworn by new physicians and attributed to Hippocrates, known as the Hippocratic oath. Still recited by students graduating from medical school, the oath fundamentally instructs physicians to “do no harm” (Gardner et al. 2001). To create a fundamental understanding of ethics, the following pages provide some working definitions, brief historical perspectives and frameworks, and touch briefly on conflicts that emerge by virtue of the multiple perspectives that exist in ethics.

The study of ethics dates back to the world’s most ancient philosophers and continues through our contemporary society as we wrestle with ethical issues and dilemmas that blur the line between the fundamental principles of right and wrong. To illustrate the far-reaching historical aspect and fundamental centrality of ethics to humankind, Gordon Clark (1959) in his discussion of ethics states that, “The first question ever asked was, what things ought I to do?” (p. 5). This statement highlights the questions that, ever since humans have been on the planet, draw attention to our struggle with the concepts of good versus bad and right versus wrong. These concepts are deeply entrenched in the question

asked by the authors of *Good Work*, as to the nature of what it means to carry out socially responsible work.

Because ethics is central to this study, it is important to have a fundamental understanding of the concept. *The Random House Unabridged Dictionary* (1993) defines ethics as “a system of moral principles...The rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc” (p. 665). According to the Josephson Institute of Ethics (2002), “ethics refers to standards of conduct, standards that indicate how one should behave based on moral duties and virtues, which themselves are derived from principles of right and wrong” (p. 1). Coombs (1998) tells us that “acting ethically means in accordance with well-justified ethical principles” (p. 556).

Morality is a theme that occurs in defining ethics. During Drake’s Spring 2003 Doctoral advanced seminar (302), entitled “Individual and Ethical Responsibilities in Learning Communities,” ethics was presented as a branch of philosophy intertwined with morals and was defined as “the study of moral standards and how they effect human conduct” (Dr. Sally Beisser, Powerpoint presentation, 2003). The Josephson Institute goes on to say that “ethics is concerned with how a moral person should behave” (p. 2). “According to Aristotle, moral percipience is a function of moral character, and the character of proper habits derived from virtuous deeds” (Marino, 2001, p. 4). Mothershead (1955) reinforces that ethics is the study of morality. Morality,

(Randomhouse,1993) "refers to generally accepted customs of conduct and right living in a society, and to the individual's practice in relation to others" (p. 1249).

The study of ethics, which goes back nearly 2,500 years, has resulted in numerous perspectives, each of which has articulated foundational beliefs and frameworks though which issues may be examined to evaluate their ethical veracity. These frameworks create, as Peter Senge (1990) might advocate, "mental models" through which individuals and groups think about and discuss ethical issues.

Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Very often we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior" (Senge, 1990, p. 8).

Arguably one of the most prolific American philosophers/writers/educators of the modern era, John Dewey, espoused a philosophy of pragmatism and opposed the "theologizing of ethics" (Clark, 1959, p. 397). Dewey's pragmatic framework, or mental model, became the foundation of his perspective for defining and discussing ethics. Dewey believed thinking and ethics should be more than a mental exercise and should lead to improving life. He defined moral conduct as "activity called forth and directed by ideas of value or worth, where the values are so mutually incompatible as to require consideration and selection before an overt action is entered upon" (p. 401). Ultimately, his philosophy resulted in a call to action. "For Dewey, the aim of education is growth, and its

moral importance resides in its social consequences – growth in personal judgment and social intelligence” (Ozman & Craver, 1999, p. 143).

An excerpt of Dewey’s ethical philosophy was included to demonstrate how a framework, or mental model influences ethical decisions one may make. Following are examples of additional frameworks through which to examine ethics. While there are differences between them, what is similar is the way in which they guide, or frame one’s thinking.

G.E. Moore’s framing asks individuals to consider three questions which guide and ultimately lead to determining ethical behavior (Clark, 1959):

1. What is meant by good?
2. What things are good in themselves?
3. What ought we to do?

Henry Sidgwick poses three moral axioms that also frame and guide ethical thinking (Clark, 1959):

1. The maximum of justice – whatever we think is right for us, we think is right for others in similar situations.
2. The maximum of prudence – focus on fairness and equity and the restraining of a desire to gain gratification.
3. The maximum of benevolence – regarding the good of others as equal to one’s own good, unless judged to be less good than one’s own.

Thomas Aquinas indicated that there were three components of all moral acts (Kanungo & Mondonca, 1996):

1. The act itself

2. The motive
3. The situation

Each of these components may be used as filters to determine the ethics of any given act by an individual or group

The often quoted and famous eastern philosopher Confucius provided ethical frameworks as well. He believed that “people need standards or rules for life, and rules were developed for a wide range of social activities” (Ozman & Craver, 1999, p. 105). He also believed “that self should not come before society because people had overriding obligations to parents, ancestors, and society as a whole” (p. 105). Confucius proposed “Five Constant Virtues for a Ruler:

1. Right attitude
2. Right procedure
3. Right knowledge
4. Right moral courage
5. Right persistence” (p. 105).

Two additional frameworks include the reciprocity norm and the social responsibility norm. The reciprocity norm (Kanungo & Mondonca, 1996) is defined as helping others who have helped or can help oneself. In contrast the social responsibility norm is characterized as helping others or those who cannot reciprocate – based on the idea that helping others is a moral imperative, energizing altruistic behavior (Kanungo & Mondonca). These two norms, while rooted in the desire to do good, provide a fundamentally different perspective on the motivation to do good for others.

While the different frameworks presented the notion that conflicting virtues create a myriad of ethical choices in any given situation, there are some ethical beliefs based on common virtues. One of those virtues commonly referred to in contemporary society as the “golden rule,” with its foundation dating back to 500 B.C., appears to transcend time, culture, and religion. The information in Table 1 cited from the Josephson Institute of Ethics, provides concrete examples of this phenomenon.

*Table 1.*

*The “Golden Rule” Across Time, Culture, and Religion*

Historical Figure	Date	Golden Rule Statement
Confucius	500 B.C.E.	What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.
Aristotle	325 B.C.E.	We should behave to others as we wish others to behave to us.
Mahabharata	200 B.C.E.	Do nothing to thy neighbor which thou wouldst not have him do you thee thereafter.
Jesus	30 B.C.	As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

Background research reveals conflicting perspectives of ethics throughout history. Conflicts can be highlighted in the fundamental disagreement between the Sophists and Socrates. “In ‘golden-age’ Athens there were teachers, namely ‘the sophists’ who claimed to be experts on ethics” (Marino, 2001, p. 3). The

Sophists believed that truth was impossible to ascertain, while on the other hand, Socrates believed that the truth was indeed attainable.

The examples of the foundations and frameworks offer multiple ways in which to examine ethical issues. They highlight that despite the passage of time and the influences from the world's most well-known philosophers, thinkers, and ethicists, human kind has not reached an agreement as to which foundations and frameworks are absolute, or whether there are any absolutes as ethical relativists would espouse. "In short, all moral reasoning, expert and non-expert, is based on assumptions" (Marino, 2001, p. 5). Dr. Stephen Covey (1989) calls these assumptions "paradigms," while Senge refers to them as "mental models" (1990).

Perspective, then, may be at the foundation of ethical dilemmas. As defined by Rushworth Kidder, an "ethical dilemma is not a choice between right and wrong, but a choice between two rights" (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996, p. 2). One's paradigm, or the way we see the world (Covey, 1989) according to Marino, may be the foundation upon which perspective determines the greater good in ethical dilemmas. Choices in ethical dilemmas are challenging on a number of fronts. "I'm discovering that business ethics...are a much more complex thing than I ever realized. It gets harder to decide when something is not quite right" (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 103).

Fundamental questions (Clark, 1959) that lend themselves to contentious perspectives cause one to ponder the basis of morality. What makes something right or wrong? What is the highest good? These questions highlight the challenge of defining ethics and morals in finite terms.



How does one work to navigate the conflict in ethical issues? Gardner et al. (2001) tell us, “of course ethical and professional dilemmas are not new. And many would argue, with some justification that the ways to deal with them have long been known. They would say the solutions can be found in the great religions of the Bible and other sacred text, in long-standing models of behavior in the very traditions of the profession” (p. 4). At the same time, “Individuals with strong character have an inner set of values, a moral compass on which they rely when facing issues that are ambiguous, difficult, or threatening” (p. 243).

Despite one’s best efforts to make correct ethical decisions, even “a person of character will not always make the proper decision, but at least he or she will have the discipline to judge whether a course of action was, in retrospect, well-motivated and judicious” (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 243). The bottom line – even ethical experts disagree (Witkin, 2000).

When groups behave in a consistently ethical manner, they are able to build trusting relationships. Despite the “warm fuzzies” that trusting relationships may imply, they have a bottom line impact on organizations. Fullan (2001) describes the development and implementation of an educational program, known as “Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards-based system: Supporting Student Achievement in an Integrated Learning Environment” developed in the San Diego City Schools where “relationships were carefully coordinated” (p. 59). With the development of relationships as an integral part of the plan, both within the organization and with outside agencies; and coupled with a focus on instruction and accountability, achievement levels increased for

three subgroups (white, Hispanic, and African-American). The percentage of students reading at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile increased by an average of over nine percentage points.

A multi-year study completed by Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider linked higher student achievement with high levels of trust between teachers and principals and among the teaching staff. In their book entitled *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (2002), the authors assert that school improvement efforts are doomed to fail without the existence of trusting relationships. It appears that a climate supportive of trusting interpersonal relationships does have an impact on the positive achievement of students.

Perhaps at its most fundamental level, the ethics of individuals or groups can be framed by asking "what would it be like to live in a world if everyone were to behave in the way I have?" (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 12). Or possibly we can establish an ethical framework "by taking to heart the words of Edward Marshall who said, 'The answer to leading others to trust...may be found by looking in the mirror and asking: Am I trustworthy [ethical]?' (Stilwell, 2003, p. 6).

### *Excellence*

A review of literature assists us in learning more about the core elements and fundamental precepts of excellence, as well as finding examples of “its operations and manifestations” (Harris, 1981, p. 8), providing a fundamental awareness and developing a better understanding of the other side of “good work.” This section of the literature examines the excellence side of the “good work” equation.

According to Dan Beckham (2002), “the drive to do good work is ancient.” The other half of the “good work” equation, according to Gardner, Damon, and Csikszentmihalyi lies in doing work that is excellent in quality. The term “excellence” is in some ways elusive. Berg, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nakamura (2003) write that standards of excellence are imparted to members within their own particular domains, or professions. This implies that no one set of specific standards for excellence fit every circumstance. Harris (1981) indicates that defining excellence “is a problem ... that has lasted 2500 years” (Harris, 1981, p. 7) and notes that “[n]either Plato or Aristotle could adequately define ‘the Good,’ nor could they define the nature of human excellence” (Harris, 1981, p. 7). If then, according to some of the world’s greatest thinkers, we cannot adequately define the concept of excellence (or “the good”), how can we use it as a criterion to define the concept of “good work?” Harris helps us out of this conundrum by telling us that “The ‘Good,’ of which excellence is its mark, is a fundamental concept of the human personality, and fundamental concepts cannot be defined – or they would not be fundamental” (pp. 7-8). Thus, according to Harris,

answering the question “What is excellence?” (p. 8) is impossible because of the fundamental nature of the concept. However, by reframing this inquiry of excellence by asking “What does excellence?” (p. 8), while “[i]ts nature is as mysterious as electricity” (p. 8), “its operations and manifestations are open for all to see under the proper conditions” (p. 8).

Harris (1981) relieves us of the responsibility to define excellence, “because the greatest minds have been unable to express the essence of our subject” (p. 8). He does state the importance, however, of being able to “recognize human excellence” (p. 8) in the cognitive, physical, moral and social dimensions of life, stating that while the nature of excellence continually evades us, there is “agreement among diverse cultures on the qualities that compose excellence” (p. 8). These qualities include efficiency, persistence, courage, and dexterity (p. 10). The following table, with definitions cited from Harris (p. 10), indicates how each of these qualities relates to excellence and the verbiage through which the qualities of excellence are attributed.

*Table 2.*

## Defining Qualities of Excellence

Qualities of Excellence	Expressed as
Efficiency	"it makes a difficult act look simple"
Persistence	"not satisfied with less than the best it can do"
Courage	"taking chances and courting failures others avoid"
Dexterity	Regarding "whatever physical skills are involved"

Harris (1981) goes on to refer to the work of Alfred North Whitehead who cited "four basic fields in which excellence should be the concern of everyone, as a civilized human being" (p. 15). The first field indicates that people should know "the highest standards and the best methods in his or her own job" (p. 15). Secondly, humans must seek "excellence in the arts that reveal and adorn man's character" (p. 15). Third, there should be "excellence in our national life, and an overriding ideal to guide them in public affairs (p. 15). And, finally, humans should understand "what is excellent in character and conduct – for everything in the end depends on this (p. 15).

The Reverend Kong Hee (2002) describes four facets of excellence in his article entitled Understanding Excellence. He first indicates that to be excellent

“means to be superior in quality” (§ 3). He believes that to be superior in quality a person goes beyond expectations in whatever their undertaking may be. It means to finish a job well. It also means meeting the needs of and adding quality to the life of others. His second aspect includes the concept that being excellent means that people get more done. He substantiates this by citing Proverbs 10.4, “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich” (Hee, 2002, § 4). Third, he believes that achieving excellence means to “transcend your job description” (Hee, 2002, § 5). He believes that “an excellent person goes beyond the call of duty” (Hee, 2002, § 5) and indicates that an average person says, “Hey, this is not my job, I’m not paid to do this!” (Hee, 2002, § 5) while the person of excellence says, “I am here to provide the best service possible to my clients or customers even if it means going the extra mile” (Hee, 2002, § 5). Finally, Hee describes excellence as outdoing oneself each time the opportunity presents itself. “The person who is plain and mediocre says, ‘Wow, I want to stay out of trouble and cruise through my career’” (Hee, 2002, § 6), while “the excellent person says, ‘Hey, I’m not complacent or satisfied with the status quo’” (Hee, 2002, § 6).

In his speech entitled “A Prescription for Excellence: Recognizing, Rewarding, and Revering It,” G.A. Cox (1988) asks, “what is excellence...and why does it matter?” (p. 567). He begins by saying that “excellence does not necessarily mean winning” (Cox, 1998, p. 567). He believes it means “giving your best...but not necessarily being the best” (Cox, 1988, p. 567). He gives the example of Olympic speed skater Scott Jantsen, who in 1988, during one of his

gold medal races fell not once, but twice. Given the emotional turmoil occurring in Jantsen's life at the time (his sister had died of leukemia hours before his race), while his efforts did not result in winning a medal, his efforts did constitute excellence. Notably, despite not having won a gold medal he did, however, lead the United States in their procession at the closing ceremonies.

Cox (1988) also believes that excellence "entails patience...and hard work." (p. 567) and that it is "a process, not an event" (p. 567). Cox also writes that it is vision that gives birth to excellence. Visions, "images people carry around in their heads and hearts" (Senge, 1990), answer the question "What do we want to create?" (p. 206). However, Cox writes that this vision requires "painstaking planning and investments that might not pay off for years" (Cox, 1988, p. 567). Ultimately Cox writes that excellence is "giving one's best via a process involving hard work and long sacrifice" (p. 567).

Mutual attributes that make up excellence are closely linked to those conditions that create it. According to Anthony Earley (1999), Chairman and CEO of Detroit Edison DTE Energy, these common attributes within his company include a positive attitude, effective people skills, personal responsibility, and intense passion for what they do. He advocates for the creation of cultures that build and nurture such attributes.

In his book entitled *True Success: A New Philosophy of Excellence*, author Tom Morris (1994) assigns several attributes to "excellence." These attributes include surpassing merit, having unusually good quality, and being superior.

Based on the Latin root of the word excellence meaning “to rise out from,” there are fundamentally two aspects of the concept of excellence. One of those aspects is that of competitive excellence. In the case of competitive excellence, based on the Latin root, excellence means to “rise out from” the crowd, standing above others in merit (Morris, 1994). The other perspective is the quality of personal excellence, meaning the quality of “rising out” of one’s own potential. These viewpoints illustrate the two main thrusts of excellence: excellence as measured against oneself and excellence measured against others (or standards) outside of oneself. The main emphasis in the remainder of this literature review will focus upon this concept of “personal excellence.”

In his work with the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Dr. Steven Covey (1989) advocates that effectiveness (the ability to achieve desired results and the ability to sustain the ability to achieve those results) is an “inside out” approach. The first three of Dr. Covey’s seven habits focus on what he refers to as the “private victory.” The private victory includes being proactive (make choices based on principles), beginning with the end in mind (personal vision/leadership) and putting first things first (personal management). This inside out approach can also be applied to a discussion around the topic of excellence.

In his discussion describing craftsmanship as “high quality work that produces high-quality results,” Beckham (2002, p. 31), cites internal excellence as a driving force to quality craftsmanship. He believes that “at its heart, craftsmanship is about caring” (p. 31) and that “Excellent results come from pride in work” (p. 31).



Morris (1994), at a fundamental level, rates personal excellence ahead of competitive excellence. He quotes an old Hindu proverb saying, "There is nothing in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self" (p. 226). He writes "personal excellence does not guarantee competitive excellence" (p. 224), adding also that "competitive excellence is not always a sure sign of personal excellence" (p. 224). However, he sums up his thesis regarding personal and competitive excellence by saying "...so if we strive for any sort of enduring excellence, we'd best concentrate on personal excellence as the way to move in that direction" (p. 227). He further says that "the most fulfilled people are individuals who delight in their work, whatever it might be, and strive to do it well" (p. 32). Ultimately he believes it is important to grasp the relationship between competitive and personal excellence, to avoid competitive wins at "great personal costs" (p. 227).

Morris (1994) also addresses the issue of finding balance in life relative to achieving excellence by asking "How can we strive for excellence and at the same time thrive as happy, fulfilled human beings?" (p. 17). He believes that when we give precedence to inner [excellence], both inner and outer fall into place" (p. 18). But balance also includes the importance of developing personal excellence in a variety of forms to sustain excellence over time (Morris, 1994). He offers four basic dimensions of life including the intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual dimensions and believes that "overall, human excellence involved participating in and flourishing along every basic dimension of human existence"

(p. 229). This is akin to Covey's (1989) advocacy to strive for balance and renewal in the physical, social/emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of life.

This concept of balance in the pursuit of excellence is almost seen as an ethical obligation to oneself. This ethical obligation of excellence is "to be the best that we can be at each and every thing we do, across a broad range of interests and activities, given the legitimate constraints of our most basic natural endowments, the opportunities we've had to develop, and the other commitments it is equally good we have" (Morris, 1994, p. 225). Morris goes on to say that "the obligation of excellence I'm talking about does not demand *unreasonable* dedication to superior performance in everything we do" (p. 226). This sentiment is echoed by Tom Hoerr (2001) who, in quoting a high school principal from a panel discussion on stress management wrote "I recognize the difference between excellence and perfection" (p. 1).

In her book entitled *Inner Excellence at Work: The Path to Meaning, Spirit, and Success*, Carol Osborn (2000) supports the idea of balance. "Personal values and quality of life considerations need not conflict with ambition and success. In fact, it is from nurturing these very qualities that your greatest experience of success will grow" (p. 8). The seven principles she conveys regarding the achievement of excellence focus on personal beliefs, growth, and development and express the idea to "pay attention to the nurturing of your heart and your greatest experiences of success will come as a by-product of the growth of spirit" (p. 9).

Much of what has been shared examines excellence in terms of personal contentment and fulfillment. In other words it is focused on looking deeper than the external tasks and focusing on finding meaning in one's "work." Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work in understanding the psychology of optimal experience, describes a concept known as "flow." Csikszentmihalyi (1990) writes that "The key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself [and that It is an activity that]... becomes intrinsically rewarding" (p. 67). Personal excellence can create what Csikszentmihalyi refers to as an autotelic experience. "The term 'autotelic' derives from two Greek words, *auto*, meaning self, and *telos*, meaning goal. It refers to a self-contained activity, one that is done not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward" (p. 67). Personal excellence while often leading to competitive excellence can be a reward within itself. He goes on to quote Thomas Carlyle who said, "Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness" (p. 14).

There is however a potentially negative aspect to excellence, as discussed by Charles Willie in his article entitled "The Excellence Movement in Education and Lessons from History." In it he connects the educational excellence movement of the 1980s to the federal government, through the creation of the 1982 document *A Nation at Risk*. Willie (1985) shares that "the National Commission on Excellence in Education advocated raising college admissions requirements and the nationwide administration of standardized tests between high school and college and at other transition points" (p. 2). He

believes that “excellence is a function of individual aspiration and accomplishment” (Wille, 1985, p. 2) and “the excellence movement that attempts to transform a personal privilege into a social obligation is inappropriate, misguided, and ultimately pathological” (Wille, 1985, p. 2). He believes that an excellence movement has “damaging social consequences” which based on the writings of Greek author Polybius (born around 200 B.C.), leads to a culture of individuals and the culture itself “striving for preeminence” (Wille, 1985, p. 3), leading to the creation of a class “reared in an atmosphere of privilege and entitlement” creating a “meritocratic formula for selecting leaders...perpetuate[ing] opportunities for some and exclude[ing] others from positions of high status and social responsibility in an arbitrary and capricious way” (p. 5). Willie says (regarding the excellence movement) that as “Polybius reminds us, those who have gained access to leadership because of their personal attributes will cease to value equality and freedom and seek to raise themselves above their fellow citizens” (p. 6). Excellence, at least from the perspective of Willie regarding a “social movement” can be as damaging as it is beneficial to a society at large.

The significance of finding meaning may be the most foundational in understanding conditions that support excellence. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, author Victor Frankl (1962) writes of his experiences of being a prisoner in a Jewish internment camp during World War II. Regarding the primacy of finding meaning, Frankl wrote, “Man's search for meaning is a primary force in his life and not a ‘secondary rationalization’ of instinctive drives. The meaning is unique

and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning" (Frankl, 1962, p. 99).

Excellence and ethics may at times seem to support one another and at other times be at odds with each other. The overlap within "good work" sometimes seemingly pitting ethics and excellence against each other is not a new topic and may be worthy of further research. This literature review and research remind us that in the study of "good work" ethics and excellence are of equal value, and perhaps it is in their synergy where the greatest meaning can be found. Finally, Morris (1994) writes that while we have an ethical obligation to strive for personal excellence, it cannot be sustained apart from the moral dimension of life.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this section of the paper I will take the opportunity to describe research methodology in general and in relation to the research methods employed to complete this study. Following a general overview of qualitative research, each of the subsections will describe a specific aspect of methodology, including participant selection, interview protocols, interviewing, and verification of data, with a broad description of each component described first, followed by the precise methods used in this study. I will also make an effort to make a connection between this research and the five traditions of qualitative research Creswell (1998) describes.

#### *Overview of Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

While “educational research has been built largely on the research traditions and methods that were initially developed in the physical and biological sciences [quantitative, or positivistic research]” (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 379), over the past 30 years “another paradigm for conducting educational research has slowly gained acceptance...and is usually called ‘qualitative’...or ‘postpositivistic’ inquiry” (p. 380). Qualitative research “emphasize[s] participant observation and

in-depth interviews that allow the researchers to learn first-hand about the social world” (p. 380).

“The qualitative research approach demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 5). Qualitative research has five distinct features. It is naturalistic, taking place in “actual settings...[and] the researcher is the key [data collection] instrument” (p. 4); descriptive in nature, taking “the form of words or pictures rather than numbers...[and] demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p. 5); concerned with process “rather than simply with outcomes or products” (p. 6); is inductive with “abstractions being built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (p. 6); and seek to create meaning by determining “how different people make sense of their lives” (p. 7).

Creswell (1998) believes that “Qualitative research shares good company with the most rigorous quantitative research, and it should not be viewed as an easy substitute for ‘statistical’ or quantitative study” (p. 16). A researcher embarking on the qualitative research journey must, according to Creswell, be willing to “commit to extensive time in the field...engage in complex, time-consuming process of data analysis...write long passages, because the evidence must substantiate claims and the writer needs to show multiple

perspectives...[and] participate in a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and is evolving and changing constantly” (pp. 16-17).

Despite the rigor, Creswell (1998) identifies five reasons for choosing a qualitative approach, including the nature of the research question (seeking to answer what and how rather than why), “because the topic needs to be *explored*” (p. 17), to provide a detailed perspective of the topic, to study participants in their “*natural setting*” (p. 17) to understand the context in which they live, and finally “because of interest in *writing* in a literary style” (p. 18).

According to Creswell (1998), we can “think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material” (p. 13). Physicist David Bohm (1980), in his book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, writes that the universe is one indivisible whole. His theory may have some application to qualitative research and the wholeness it provides through the connections and interrelationships between the data collection, verification, analysis, and the writing of a qualitative research paper. Creswell (1998) supports this notion of interconnectedness of process by saying, “I view verification as a **process** that occurs throughout the data collection, **analysis** [bold added for emphasis], and reporting writing of a study” (p. 194). This statement by Creswell reinforces the notion that the entire process of qualitative research is holistic in nature.

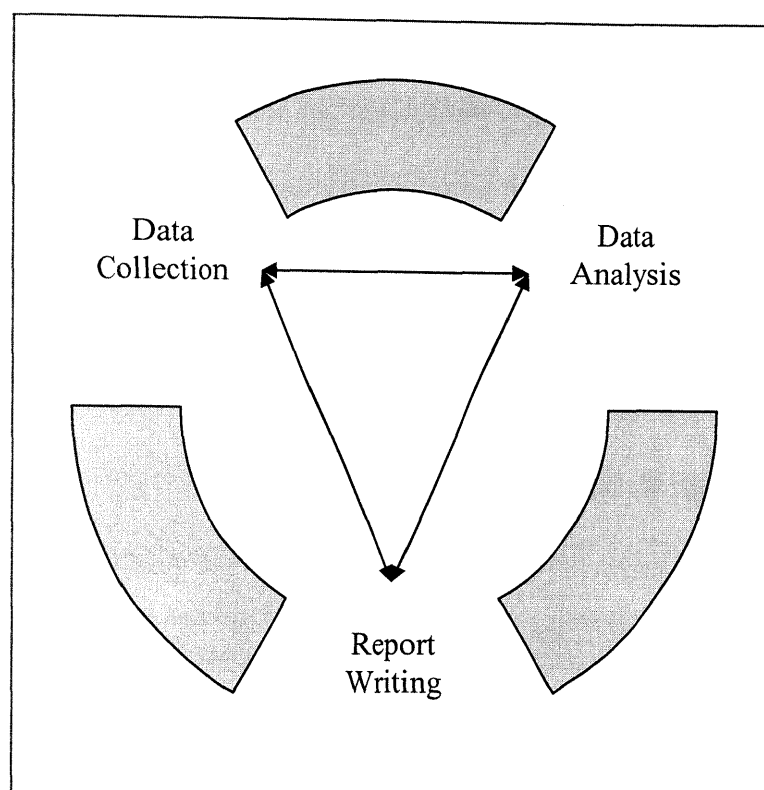
The relationship between data collection, analysis, and report writing causes one to look at the processes in a circular manner, rather than a linear



one. Dr. Senge, in his work with systems, talks about “circles of causality” (Senge, 1990, p. 73). In these circles we remove the fragmentation in our thinking and language that shapes our perceptions. One’s thinking can be in some ways bound by “Western languages, with their subject-verb-object structure...biased toward a linear view” (Senge, 1990, p. 74). However, in a language of interrelationships, we view events as unfolding and interconnecting, which given the research on qualitative research that has been read for this dissertation, is very fitting in describing the qualitative research process. To utilize Senge’s work, we might view the process of qualitative research as a circle of causality and relationships. The challenge in describing such a process lies in the idea by Bohm (1980) that the current structure of our language, based on a subject-verb structure, does not provide the capability to accurately describe such concepts because our language is linear in nature, while what we are describing is non-linear. This can be difficult to grasp, because in its essence, our language which has structured our thinking can prevent us from accurately understanding systemic causality and relationships.

Figure 1 is a pictorial illustration of the interconnectedness between data collection, analysis, and the writing of the narrative.

Figure 1. Circle of Causality/Relationships in Qualitative Research



Viewing qualitative research in a circular fashion prevents a fragmentation of the process, promoting the notion that qualitative research is a holistic approach to research.

Ultimately, qualitative research allows the researcher to describe human and social conditions in such descriptive ways that cannot be addressed by quantitative methods.

### *A Bi-Modal Approach*

In the purest of fashion, this study represents more of a bi-modal approach to qualitative research. By the nature of methodology, analysis, and narrative structure, it includes aspects of both the grounded theory and ethnographic traditions of qualitative research. Grounded theory's purpose is to discover a theory that relates to a particular situation, while an ethnographic study seeks to describe and interpret a cultural or social group system (Creswell, 1998). In this case it is the underpinnings and description of "good work" among educational leaders in Iowa that is being undertaken.

Creswell (1998) identifies five traditions of qualitative study, including biography, phenomenology, case study, ethnography, and grounded theory. Articulated and elaborated by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), the grounded theory tradition has its theoretical orientation from the field of sociology. Glover and Strauss "held that theories should be 'grounded' in data, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of people" (Creswell, 1998, p. 56).

According to Brian Haig from the University of Canterbury, the "general goal [of grounded theory] is to construct theories in order to understand phenomena" (Haig, 1995. ¶ 3). Haig goes on to describe three conditions that define a good grounded theory, including being "(1) inductively derived from data, (2) subjected to theoretical elaboration, and (3) judged adequate to its domain with respect to a number of evaluative criteria" (¶ 3).

Creswell (1998) cites four challenges of conducting grounded theory research. They include the challenge of setting aside pre-existing theoretical ideas or notions (Dr. Peter Senge calls these pre-existing ideas mental models and defines them as “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and take action (Senge, 1990, p. 8) to allow a theory to emerge, remembering that although this is a non-linear, evolving, and inductive process there is a systematic approach to the research and data analysis (Creswell, 1998), determining when the saturation point (a point at which no more information can be found) has been reached or “when the theory is sufficiently detailed” (Creswell, 1998, p. 58), and being mindful that the “primary outcome of this study is a theory with specific components: a central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, conditions and context, and consequences” (p. 58).

Joyceen S. Boyle (1994) writes that “good ethnography is always holistic; it is always contextual; it is always reflexive” (p. 159). With its roots in cultural anthropology (Creswell, 1998), ethnography examines cultures and reveals the significance and complexities of behaviors through what is known as “thick description.” Ethnography “should account for behavior of people by describing what it is they know that enables them to behave appropriately, given the dictates of common sense in their community” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 27).

Creswell, 1998, cites four challenges of engaging in ethnographic studies. These challenges include a need for the researcher to be grounded in cultural anthropology, time to collect data, the use of a narrative style of writing, and the

possibility that the ethnographer will “go native” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61) and not be able to complete the study. Challenges do exist for the qualitative researcher. However, the benefits of qualitative research in terms of the meaning that is created seem to outweigh the challenges.

### *Data Collection Process*

#### *Selection of Participants*

In the data collection portion of the *Good Work* research process, the initial sample of research subjects consisted of 56 geneticists and 60 journalists. The authors and their research assistants conducted these interviews. This study, being completed by one individual, will be smaller in scope. For the purpose of this study, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with high profile educational leaders in Iowa who hold significant leadership positions influencing district, state, and national educational decisions. The key leverage point for this portion of the study will be the selection of subjects for the study.

Creswell (1998) believes “The purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in a qualitative study” (p.118). There are a number of purposeful sampling strategies available to the qualitative researcher. Creswell “recommend[s] that qualitative researchers, regardless of tradition [biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study], examine the typology of 16 strategies for purposeful sampling advanced by Miles and Huberman” (1998, p. 118). A very appropriate sampling strategy utilized for this study was the criterion sampling. In criterion sampling, each participant meets the criterion established; in this case that of being an educational leader in

Iowa. Borg and Gall (1989) similarly identify interviews known as key informant interviews in which “informants are members of the group under study who have special knowledge or perceptions that are not otherwise available to the researcher” (p. 398).

Regardless of labels, participants in this study will be selected by virtue of their standing as educational leaders in the state of Iowa. In the case of the Good Work project, “Most of the subjects in each group were well-known figures who had been nominated by experts in the domain; but in each realm we also spoke to a handful of ‘midlevel practitioners’ - long term professionals who would not be widely known” (Gardner et al., 2001, p. x). For the purpose of this research the sample will include ten individuals who hold high level positions of educational leadership in Iowa.

Because there are hundreds of public schools in Iowa and many private institutions, by definition there are hundreds of individuals who could be identified as educational leaders in Iowa. The scope of my knowledge of educational leaders in Iowa is limited, for the most part to central Iowa, particularly the Des Moines metro area. Glesne (1999) pointed out that “it helps to know an insider who is familiar with the individuals and the politics involved who can advise you in making access decisions” (p. 39). One organization in Iowa that is particularly familiar with and attuned to both the individuals and politics of Iowa educational leadership is School Administrators of Iowa. School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) is the state’s professional organization for school leaders, whose mission is to “support, encourage and develop you as an educational leader” (SAI, p. 2).

I initially contacted SAI leadership through a phone conversation in January of 2004, I briefly shared the topic of my dissertation and at that time had asked if SAI would be willing to guide me in establishing of a pool of individuals from which I could select interviewees for my research. SAI leadership indicated a genuine interest in my topic and a willingness to help identify well-respected educational leaders in Iowa as potential candidates for this study. Interestingly (and conjuring up the concept once again of “synchronicity”), SAI was currently leading a professional development opportunity, funded by the Carver Charitable Trust on the topic of “Leading with Soul, “a cohort experience for superintendents to come together to explore the moral dimensions of leadership” (Amy Swanson, Personal Communication, August 2, 2004). In other words, SAI was leading an effort to examine the ethical and moral side of educational leadership through this series of workshops.

On Tuesday, June 8, 2004, I met with the SAI leadership at the School Administrators of Iowa office. During our visit I spent time sharing in greater detail the construct and purpose of my research. As we worked collaboratively, 13 names surfaced as potential participants in the research. Seven of these individuals were current superintendents and the remaining six held positions of regional or state-wide leadership in Iowa. While we had an initial concern that nine of the 13 were male, we felt that that ratio was a fair representation of the ratio of males to females in official educational leadership positions throughout the state. I left the meeting with 13 names and phone numbers to begin my search for participants who would be willing to participate in this study. Similarly,

as described in *Good Work*, “This sample [of participants] is neither random nor systematically structured in a research sense...” The intent of this selection process was to identify highly respected leaders from Iowa in the field of educational leadership.

I began the next day making “cold” phone calls to highly respected educational leaders throughout Iowa who emerged from the identification process to request their participation in my study. Each phone call began with me identifying myself (“Hi, my name is Doug Stilwell and I am a doctoral candidate at Drake University”), what I was doing (“I am currently on the ‘last leg’ toward earning my degree and am embarking on the research and writing of my dissertation”), and that they had been identified by School Administrators of Iowa, as an excellent educational leader in the state of Iowa. Sometimes I was not able to speak directly to the potential participants and I left numerous voice mail messages. Each of the voice mail messages left were returned by every potential participant, demonstrating a professional courtesy that helped me to form very positive first impressions of the candidates. Following these introductions and overviews, we worked to set up times to meet to conduct the interviews. Being the summer with the added flexibility it provides for many educators, the process of scheduling interviews was much simpler than if I had attempted to do so during the school year. Each of the interviewees was very accommodating in helping meet my needs as a researcher and many indicated an interest in the topic which I was studying.



Interestingly and speaking to the willingness to support educational research, every person I was able to contact agreed to take time to be interviewed for this research. It might be a fascinating study in itself to ask the question of what it means that 100% of the very busy educational leaders I contacted were very willing to be a part of this study.

Following the phone contact, an informational letter describing the study was mailed to each participant, along with a formal consent form for each participant to sign indicating their permission to participate in the research.

As a part of the process of involving human subjects in the research, this work has been approved by Drake's Human Subjects Research Review subcommittee. "The Human Subjects Research Review (HSRR) subcommittee of the Drake University Senate reports to the Educational Policies and Issues Committee and is responsible for reviewing all research proposals involving human subjects in order to protect and assure the rights of research subjects as defined by ethical considerations and government guidelines" ([http://www.educ.drake.edu/doc/human\\_subjects/human\\_subjects\\_review.html](http://www.educ.drake.edu/doc/human_subjects/human_subjects_review.html)). (see Appendix E).

### *Interview Protocols*

The interview protocols (Appendix B) were based on the protocols used by researchers in the Good Work project as they interviewed geneticists and journalists. Questions aligned with the "central" question of the study as well as the subquestions identified earlier in the proposal. Interview questions were based on the purpose and central question of the study and are aligned with the

idea that researchers should be “designing interview questions that address research questions” and should be formed “on the basis of what truly needs to be known” (Anfara , Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). Study participants received a copy of the questions in advance of the interviews. It is important to make a “public disclosure of process” (Anfara et al., p. 29) when conducting qualitative research. It is also espoused that interview questions should flow from the study’s central and secondary research questions.

Originally, 35 interview questions were prepared, flowing from the eight broad secondary research questions and based on the protocols from *Good Work*. However, given the fact that my potential interview participants would hold very time intensive leadership positions in their educational organizations, I collapsed the original 35 questions to eight research subquestions that would serve well as the core of the interview questions, with opportunities no doubt arising for follow-up questions along the way. Each interview was anticipated to last between 60-90 minutes.

As a strategy to disclose the connection between these two components a matrix (Table D1) was created which delineated the relationship between the study’s central and sub questions and the interview protocol. Table D1 (see Appendix D) provides a structure for question analysis to “ensure that the right questions are asked...that will address the study’s main question(s)” (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). In addition it also provides a view into the complexity and interconnectedness of the research, creating the thick and rich description that will evolve throughout the study of “good work” in educational leadership. The

matrix displays the relationship between the central and sub questions and the original interview questions. The central and subquestions are found in the left-hand side of the matrix and to the right of each research question are the codes that refer to the specific interview questions.

### *Interviewing*

"The best-known representatives of qualitative research studies and those that most embody the characteristics we just touched on are those that employ the techniques of **participant observation** and **in-depth interviewing**" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 2). "An interview is a purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more (Morgan, 1988), that is directed by one in order to get information from the other" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, pp. 94-95). For the purpose of this study, and in keeping with the tradition of qualitative research, in-depth interviewing will serve as the major source of data collection.

Ultimately, "The goal of understanding how the person you are interviewing thinks is at the center of the interview" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 98). Generally, while open-ended in a qualitative study, interviews can take a number of forms. "Some interviews, although relatively open-ended, are focused around particular topics, or may be guided by some general questions" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 95). In an open-ended interview the interviewer "encourages the subject to talk in the area of interest and then probes more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent initiates" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 96).

Often, an interview is “like a conversation” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 97), inviting subjects to think deeply. This invitation to think deeply is facilitated by the interviewer being fully engaged in good listening, demonstrating empathy, making eye contact, showing genuine interest, and by taking the interviewee seriously. In his work, Dr. Stephen R. Covey (1989) refers to deep listening as empathic listening - “listening with the intent to understand” (p. 240). Covey goes on to say when one engages in empathic listening, one “listen[s] for feeling, for meaning” (p. 241). In so doing it “gives you accurate data to work with” (p. 241).

Dr. Peter Senge refers to these types of meaning-filled conversations as dialogue. “In dialogue, individuals gain insights that simply could not be achieved individually” (1990, p. 240). During a qualitative interview, similar to what Senge tells us, interviewers “become observers of their own thinking” (p. 242). These observations and insights can bring greater meaning to interviews and consequently to the qualitative process.

While there are “no rules that can apply to all interviews” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 97), general ground rules that support openness and focus on creating deep meaning will add to the tapestry of data for the qualitative interview.

One rule that did apply to this process was that of respecting the time schedule of each person. Interviews were scheduled with each of the individuals by phone. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Follow-up notes were sent to each of the participants, thanking them for their time and for sharing their insights into good work.

*Table 3.*

## Interview Timeline

Interviewee	Date	Time
A1	June 23, 2004	11:00 a.m.
A2	June 25, 2004	9:00 a.m.
A3	June 25, 2004	1:30 p.m.
A4	June 28, 2004	11:00 a.m.
B1	July 6, 2004	2:30 p.m.
B2	July 6, 2004	4:00 p.m.
B3	July 15, 2004	2:00 p.m.
B4	July 20, 2004	1:00 p.m.
B5	July 30, 2004	8:00 a.m.
C1	August 12, 2004	9:30 a.m.

*Verification of Data**Overview*

The fundamental purpose of qualitative data verification is to answer the question "How do we know that the qualitative study is believable, accurate and 'right'?" (Creswell, 1998, p. 193). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) indicate that a common criticism directed at qualitative research is that it fails to adhere to canons of reliability and validity. Strategies of verification including internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity that have been traditionally addressed

in quantitative studies have often been questioned in the realm of qualitative research.

However, qualitative theorists have responded to the concern surrounding validity, reliability, and objectivity having indicated that those criteria for verification “simply could not be addressed well in naturalistic research” (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 29). Lincoln and Guba (1985) framed these issues in another manner renaming the rigor criteria (validity, reliability, and objectivity) trustworthiness criteria.

In qualitative research, the four tenets of quantitative validity (internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity), according to Anfara et al. (2002) are restated as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. “Within these [tenets] were specific methodological strategies for demonstrating qualitative rigor, such as the audit trail, member checks when coding, categorizing, or confirming results with participants, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, structural corroboration, and referential material adequacy” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 2).

Creswell (1998) has also identified eight procedures for qualitative research verification. They include prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, rich and thick description, and external audits. In other words, through the use of these verification strategies qualitative researchers can better address the concerns regarding the rigor, standards and quality of verification. These strategies provide researchers

different models appropriate for qualitative designs to guarantee rigor without sacrificing the significance of qualitative research.

In one of these strategies, triangulation, “researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). By conducting such validations procedures as triangulation, it

ensures that the study will be accurate because the information is not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection. In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible (p. 280).

To demonstrate rigor in ensuring validity, triangulation is based on the premise that “to establish a fact you need more than one source of information” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 107).

### *Grounded Theory*

According to Creswell (1998), “grounded theorists, too, believe that the responsibility for establishing verification in a study rests with the researcher” (p. 208). He believes that validation, or verification (according to Strauss and Corbin who “alternate between the terms verification and *validity*” [p. 209]), is an active part of the research process and is later used as a standard by which to judge the quality of the study.

One technique of validation known as discriminant sampling is one important step in grounded theory researching [in which a researcher would] develop open coding categories and then, through axial

coding...interrelate these categories. Here an important verification step takes place. The researcher poses questions that relate the categories and then returns to the data and looks for evidence, incidents, and events that support or refute the questions, thereby verifying the data (Creswell, 1998, p. 209).

After the theory has been written, further literature review for “supplemental validation” (Creswell, 1998, p. 209) is undertaken to validate accuracy of the theory or to determine how the theory is different from what the literature review has revealed. “Finally, for outside reviewers to judge the quality of a grounded theory study, judgments are made about the ‘validity, reliability, and credibility’ of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) within the canons of scientific research” (Creswell, 1998, p. 209). Ultimately, through this ongoing process “the researcher’s lens becomes critical in the process of establishing the verification of data” (p. 209).

### *Ethnography*

While some ethnographers such as Wolcott (1990, as cited by Creswell, 1998, p. 210) “show little interest in verification of their studies,” there are techniques available that allow ethnographers to meet rigorous standards of quality and verification of data. One of the most common used strategies for ethnographic verification is triangulation. Triangulation, “As Fielding and Fielding (1986) stated puts the researcher in a frame of mind to regard his or her own material critically, to test it, to identify its weaknesses, to identify where to test further doing something different (p. 24)” (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 33).



Bogdan and Biklen (2003) “advise against using the term [triangulation]” (p. 107). They believe the term is used “in such an imprecise way that it has become difficult to understand what is meant by it” (p. 107). They advocate that researchers use plain language and “just say what data collecting techniques were used” (p. 107).

Verification through triangulation can be achieved through the process of methodological triangulation, which involves the coming together of data from multiple data collection sources including interviewing multiple individuals, using the same interview protocols for each interviewee.

Triangulation of data occurs “throughout the data collection, analysis and report writing” (Creswell, 1998, p. 194) processes to provide corroborating evidence supporting the credibility (internal validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) of this research. Other strategies for data verification include informant feedback, member checking, and reflexivity.

### Data Analysis

In this part of the chapter I will share the procedures I followed for the daunting task of analyzing my interview data. It will include excerpts of information from qualitative authorities that support the use of the techniques I have employed.

Data analysis means “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 147). It “involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into

manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns" (p. 147).

Throughout the process of conducting ten interviews, I was engaged in the process of asking questions and then listening intently to responses and determining if follow-up questions were necessary for further clarification. As the time for each interview ranged from 45-60 minutes, I did not even consider the amount of data I was collecting through this data collection strategy. It was not until the process of interview transcription was complete and hard copies of all ten interviews were in my possession that I gave full appreciation to the task of data analysis.

One limitation within my analysis resulted from the use of an audio tape recorder. As the primary data collection device utilized I was unable to record, and hence analyze the facial expressions and body language of each person. According to research presented by Dr. Steven Covey (1989) the words we use account for only 7% of what is communicated. The remaining 93% is made up of tone, body language, and facial expressions. While the tape player was able to pick up words, laughter and tones, it was unable to pick up on body language and facial expression.

With over 120 single-spaced pages of interview transcriptions now serving as my data points, it was time to move from the theoretical, which had been described in this paper in earlier sections, to the pragmatic task at hand of sorting through the data, organizing it, analyzing and synthesizing it in an attempt to make sense of it and bring coherency to the information. It was at this time that I

realized the enormity of the task ahead and I found the analysis to be a monumental and daunting task (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

In their process of data collection and analysis of over 100 interviews, my self-proclaimed mentors and authors of *Good Work*, Gardner et al. had the good fortune to have at their disposal numerous research assistants to assist in all phases of the research process. In as much as one of the purposes of writing a dissertation for the completion of a doctoral degree is to demonstrate the capacity to conduct scholarly research, this was not an option available for me to pursue. Yet, in what can be described as an overwhelming feeling of “information overload,” due to the vast amounts of data to be analyzed, I was able to find solace and strength in the following words:

Pick one interview...Go through it, asking yourself, what is this about? Do not think about the “substance” of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin. When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics...Now take your list and go back to the data. Abbreviate the topics as codes next to the appropriate segments of the text...Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place (Creswell, 1994, p. 155).

While my data analysis process did not end up looking exactly as Creswell has described, the general “gist” of his structure was followed and allowed me to begin the process without the feeling of being totally overwhelmed by the quantity of data.

My initial step of data analysis included reading through each transcript while listening to its accompanying recording. This served as a tool to reacquaint myself with each of the interviews and interviewees, allowing a deeper initial synthesis of the data had I only read the responses. By including listening as a strategy in the process of data analysis, I was able to hear not only each of the interviewee's words, but also the "intent of their language, as opposed to the literalness communicated beyond the words themselves through tone, volume, pauses, metaphor and other subtle nuances of speech" (Rick Johnson; speech pathologist, personal communication, August 28, 2004). This technique provided me the opportunity to listen for the "hidden meanings below the surface of literal conversation" (Rick Johnson, 2004). As was recommended by Creswell (1998), I took notes in the margins of the text which reflected a summary meaning of various aspects of each interview.

After all of the interviews had been listened to, their transcriptions read, and notes taken; I began the process of organizing the data in ways that I felt would make sense and also help meaning to emerge. To complete this task, I coded each of the questions and answers from every interview based on and related to this study's original eight research subquestions (What does it mean to do excellent work in educational leadership? How is excellence encouraged and supported in educational leadership? What challenges a leader's ability to engage in excellent work? What does it mean to do ethical work as an educational leader? How is ethical work encouraged and supported? What issues or circumstances challenge the ethical behaviors of educational leaders?

What does it mean to carry out “good work” in the professional realm of educational leadership today? What does the future hold for “good work” in educational leadership?). These eight subquestions, of course, flowed from this study’s central research question, “What does it mean to carry out ‘good work’ in the professional realm of educational leadership in Iowa today?”

Following the coding of each interview’s questions and responses, I utilized the “cut and paste” method, literally cutting apart the interview transcriptions and placing like-coded questions and responses in a pile and paper-clipping them together (I had considered “cutting and pasting” electronically with the use of technology, but others who had attempted this method cautioned that handling the large of amounts of data in such a way was slow and inefficient and had sometimes caused their computers to crash).

Once the data were organized by research questions, I began to re-read each response, one question at a time and found I was better able to focus my thinking. During this process I highlighted sections from each response and took further notes in the margins of the pages, which included what I felt to be “central ideas” from each of the responses. At the completion of my analysis of each question’s responses, a table was created for each research sub question to more succinctly organize and store the main ideas that had emerged from the data.

*Table 4.*

## Example of Research Sub-Question Data Table

What does it mean to do excellent work as an educational leader?

Interviewee	Response
A1	
A2	
A3	
A4	

(Rows continue B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, C1)

After themes emerged and merged, I again searched through each sub question's responses to locate specific examples that supported the emergent themes until no more could be found. Creswell (1998) refers to this process as saturation and is a technique employed in grounded theory data analysis. These examples were further coded for clarification. At the same time, specific quotes were located that would be used in the either the "Findings" or "Conclusions/Recommendations" sections of this paper. Creswell, 1998, indicates that the use of quotes "brings the voice of the participants to the study" (p. 170).

Following the process of analyzing responses to each question individually to allow themes to emerge in a process used in grounded theory known as open

coding, analysis continued through coaxial coding, during which themes were linked and relationships between responses established. Finally, thematic relationships were created which allowed me to “build a story” through the connection of these themes.

While techniques from the grounded theory tradition were invaluable to the process of discovering and linking themes from the data as a hybrid tradition of research, the purpose of this work was not to discover underlying theories relating to excellence and ethics in educational leadership. Rather, the purpose of this study is to provide a description of the state of and identify forces that influence efforts to engage in “good work” by selected educational leaders in Iowa. Because of that purpose, utilizing data analysis strategies from the grounded theory tradition were not enough. It was also necessary to engage in techniques that aligned more with the ethnographic tradition providing a more holistic analysis and interpretation of what it was the interviewees were sharing. This analysis fundamentally included trying to interpret and make sense of what the data meant so that it could be written in a narrative form that would tell a coherent story. To this end it was necessary to analyze the data and understand it within the context of the day to day workings of educational leaders, through what Creswell (1998) calls the “interpretation of the culture-sharing group” (p. 153). In this step I needed to “go beyond the databases and probes...drawing inferences from the data” (Creswell, 1998, p. 153), including examining leadership theory to provide the necessary structure for my interpretations. I was able to provide some level of context to this analysis through my 12 years of

experience as an educational leader. I also relied on the knowledge I have gained through graduate studies of leadership theory, from my master's work through my doctoral studies. Ultimately, aligned with the ethnographic research tradition, much of this analysis is personalized through my interpretation and as Wolcott (1994) states is "what I make of it... [and]... how the research experience affected me" (p. 44).

### Ethnographic Narrative Style

In the methodology section of this paper I noted that I was employing a bi-modal approach to the research, utilizing strategies from both the grounded theory and ethnographic traditions of qualitative research. While this bi-modal approach was appropriate in methodology to accomplish my goals, the sharing of the findings will employ an ethnographic narrative style of writing.

While not a classic ethnographic study, this work does seek to "account for the behavior of people by describing what it is they know that enables them to behave appropriately given the dictates of common sense in their community [in this case, educational leadership]" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 27). As my purpose for this research is to reveal what it means for educational leaders to do "good work" an ethnographic writing style seems appropriate. However, almost as a caution for those who are more accustomed to a quantitative style of writing, an ethnographic narrative style is a much difference experience with a different "feel" to it. It is a style that is "personal, familiar, perhaps 'up-close,' highly readable, friendly, and applied for a broad audience" (Creswell, 1998, p. 170).



Fundamentally, “ethnographic writers tell a story” (Creswell, 1998, p. 185). The goal, according to a handout from Dr. Sally Beisser from Drake’s DOC 306 Qualitative Research Methods in the spring of 2003, is “to convey the ‘feel’ as well as the ‘facts’.” There is a distinctive style which includes what qualitative researchers refer to as “thick” description. In a thick description the author “presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships... [and] evokes emotionality and self feelings” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). An ethnographic narrative provides interpretations of life, “common sense understandings that are complex and difficult to separate from each other” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 28). Through these descriptions and complexities ethnography “offers an opportunity to see ‘culture at work’” (Creswell, 1998, p. 225).

Within a qualitative study the researcher takes on a different role than in a quantitative study and acknowledges his or her bias and influence in the study. However, this does provide researchers a way of “separating themselves from or revealing to others their personal bias” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 188). In this way the author explicitly discloses his or her position and the ways in which they “may have shaped the narrative” (Creswell, 1998, p. 172). This style of writing may be described as “more honest because it shows and tells the reader that you are aware of your own subjectivity. It also wants the reader to take this into account” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 189).

An ethnographic account frees the writer to express “voice,” which Derrida (1980, as cited by Creswell, 1998, p. 171) describes as the “metaphysics of presence.” The opportunity to “give voice” is something that has come to be

associated with qualitative research. With its roots in feminist writing, it voice empowers people, often those who have been oppressed to tell their stories to bring out social changes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 201). Creswell (1998) indicates that it is necessary for qualitative researchers to give voice to a study's participants.

There are several techniques employed in writing an ethnographic narrative. One strategy, excerpt commentary, is a method "whereby an author incorporates an analytic point, provides orientation information about the point, presents the excerpt or direct quote, and then advances the analytic commentary about the quote as it refers to the analytic point" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995 as cited by Creswell, 1998, p. 183). The use of these quotes provides and opportunity for the writer to share the perspective of the "insiders" and gives them voice in the study. In another strategy a researcher uses figures of speech, such as metaphors, "illustrations, cases, and/or vignettes that form a part but stand for the whole" (p. 193-194).

The use of the pronoun "I" will be more prominent in an ethnographic accounting. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), over the past 15 years a shift has occurred from making references such as "we" or "the researcher," which are less personal, to what is described as the "more familiar 'I'" (p. 188). Some believe that "I" is more honest and direct, and that the use of the term the "researcher," in its attempt to demonstrate authority is pretentious and has backfired.

There are quality examples of this style of writing from well-respected researchers and writers. I cite Gardner et al. (2001) to demonstrate how this style can be used effectively to convey research findings.

The word *calling* may sound antiquated today, but the notion still lies at the heart of what having a meaningful vocation signifies. Indeed, the Latin root of *vocation* means “to be called,” and the suggestion has long prevailed that a good worker is “called to a task set by God especially for that worker (p. 163).

This style of writing is used quite successfully by Wendy Luttrell in her ethnography entitled *School-Smart and Mother-Wise* (1997).

In writing about women’s identities I have worked to avoid a distanced “I-they” or a false “we” to convey what was learned. I actively solicited and received feedback from many of the women about my description and analysis and made appropriate revisions based on their remarks. The final version, however, is more mine than theirs (p. xv).

I have chosen to utilize this style of research and writing so that I may share both what the interviewees had to say and what the research meant to me. Much as Luttrell (1997) writes regarding the portrayal of the data collected from her study’s subjects, “I have attempted to convey their stories in ways they will recognize, but also in ways that reveal underlying assumption...the final version, however, is more mine than theirs” (p. xv). Because of this I acknowledge myself as an integral part of all phases of this research, allowing my own “voice” to be

heard throughout this study as I describe the condition of good work among eminent educational leaders in Iowa.

## Chapter 4 FINDINGS

### *Introduction*

#### *Interview Reflections*

Over a six week period of time between June and August I interviewed ten top quality educational leaders in the state of Iowa. Five of the individuals served as superintendents, while five held positions at executive levels of leadership in what I would categorize as educational support organizations across the state. Four of the individuals were female, six were male. Each of the individuals had begun their educational careers as teachers and sought positions of formal leadership as a means of greater leverage and influence in education. The superintendents greatly influence work within their districts and communities. The individuals from the educational support organizations, who hold positions at the executive level of their institutions, provide leadership on a state-wide level and have influence at the national level. These participants were selected for this study because all are well-respected as quality educational leaders in Iowa. During the course of this research, member checks were conducted with interviewees to corroborate and ensure accuracy of the findings within this report.

Following each interview I engaged in the process of reflexive writing (Boyle, 1994), a process of thinking deeply, not so much about the content of the interviews, but about my perceptions of the interview process with each person. Analyzing notes of my impressions provided further context for understanding this group of leaders as well as my experiences as a qualitative researcher.

While summer seemed an ideal time to conduct the interviews because of the slower pace as compared to the school year, I thought I might be intruding on their discretionary time. However, once I began the process I found the attitudes of these professionals to be quite the contrary. During all of the interviews I felt very welcome by each of the individuals. Each indicated a genuine interest in helping me complete my research. Several who held doctoral degrees communicated an understanding of what I was experiencing in this process of writing a dissertation. One respondent said, "someone helped me complete my research when I was working on my dissertation, so I will 'give back' by doing likewise for you." Those who did not hold doctorate degrees were just as accommodating.

While none of the interviewees were personally familiar with the collaborative efforts by Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon to write *Good Work* (2001), the subtopics of excellence and ethics in education piqued a great deal of interest. Therefore, I took time at the beginning of each interview to explain the background, framework and premise for *Good Work*, how I had become interested in it, and why I had chosen it for my dissertation topic. Respondents conveyed a genuine interest in the concept of "good work."

Interviewees appeared very eager to share their thoughts with me and some seemed to view this as real opportunity to have their voices "heard" regarding their views of good work in educational leadership. While following the scripting of questions I had prepared, some interviews moved in tangents related

to the topics, demonstrating a high degree of passion and fervor about various aspects of education. I responded to interviewee initiative, yet focused on the structure designed to gather the information I was seeking.

As expected, each of the individuals possessed and demonstrated a high degree of intelligence and knowledge. With each holding a position of significant power and authority, this came as no surprise. Yet there was an interesting variance of communication styles of the interviewees. Some responded with a more cerebral fashion, not in the pejorative sense, but taking time to ponder each question, think and gather their thoughts. Others appeared to be more intuitive or instinctive and responded as though questions quickly struck a meaningful chord with them. There was a wide variety in the volume of each of the speakers. Some spoke with greater volume and others spoke softly. The only impact of each speaker's volume was on the ability of my tape recorder's microphone to pick up the conversation, creating challenges for those who assisted me with the interview transcriptions (I had neglected, despite being warned, to use an external microphone. This resulted in greater challenges to hear some of the softer-spoken individuals). Some interviewees tended to be more philosophical and others more pragmatic, with most falling somewhere in between. What I learned through this reflexive process regarding communication styles was not to be quick to judge someone based on their response style or patterns of their speech. Regardless of communication style, what I found most apparent was that these ten individuals were powerful thinkers demonstrating great coherency and

clarity of thought. Each in his or her own style effectively communicated their ideas.

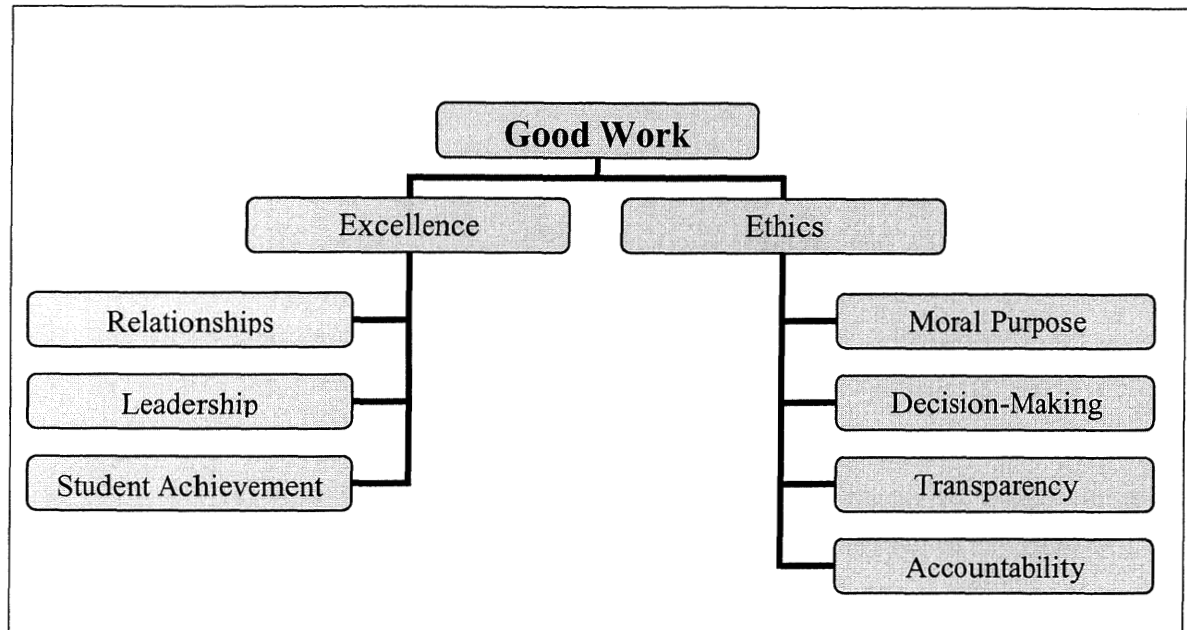
Because of the positions of authority and position power each of these individuals held, each served as their own “gatekeeper.” In other words, they were very much in control of their own time and it was not necessary for me to work through a third party for approval to schedule or conduct the interviews.

I met with all but one of these individuals in his or her office. The individual at whose office we did not meet was kind enough to meet with me in the lobby of his hotel when he was in the area, so that I would not have to make the several hour trek to his school district. In each situation, I was made to feel like a welcomed guest and was given the undivided attention of the interviewees. During the interviews, no phone calls were taken, no one came to the door, and no email was read or other work done that might interrupt our time. In other words, I was privy to each individual’s complete attention during our time together; an opportunity for which I am thankful and honored.

In the following pages the good work of these prominent leaders will be presented and described. Figure 2 provides a diagrammatic representation of the major attributes of good work.



Figure 2. Attributes of Good Work



### *What “Does” Excellence?*

In hindsight, the challenge of defining “the good” or excellence, as described in the literature review, now seems to be like a foreshadowing for the varied responses I received when I asked each of the interviewees what it meant to do excellent work. Some struggled more to articulate it than others and one of the individuals went so far as to say, “well, this word is difficult for me...I typically see excellence used about things that I don’t really care that much about...like test scores or something, like it’s a measurable kind of thing; [that] it’s not a deep thing, [that] it’s a very surface thing...Or I think of excellence as being a word that people use because they want something that sounds good but they don’t have a clue of what it means or anything about it.”

Most of the responses didn't focus so much on what excellence was, *per se*. Rather than answering the question, "what is excellence?" the interviewees seemed to answer the question, "what **does** excellence?" (Harris, 1981) In so doing I found three major themes that emerged from the interviews revealing what it means to do excellent work: relationships, leadership, and a focus on student need and achievement. As a qualitative researcher I believe it is important to recognize and acknowledge my own bias when engaging in such an activity. These three themes emerged not only because of the data itself, but also because of my existing paradigms and mental models which influenced my interpretations.

### *Relationships*

Relationships emerged as a major theme of what it means to do excellent work. Interviewees felt that the development of close relationships occurred through trust building. Trust (Stilwell, 2003) might be viewed as a systemic structure, impacting all aspects of an organization. If that is truly an accurate premise, then the establishment of trust is fundamental in developing relationships in an organization. One leader indicated that "when you talk about excellent leaders, trust is a huge factor. When your staff feels that they have trust in you and you trust them to make good decisions, it creates an environment where it's safe to take risks, causing people to take greater ownership."

Why are relationships important in the realm of educational leadership? Relationships are needed because it is important to develop a kinship toward one another. As one leader put it "we need to instill a sense of belonging; a sense of

community.” One leader shared that developing relationships was fundamentally important because as we look at our students, “they’re all our kids.” In other words, the sharing of the children entrusted to schools and school districts implicitly creates a relationship between all those educators who serve them. Explicitly developing the relationships makes these connections more evident. As one superintendent pointed out, “you know, we’re all in this together. We’re all in the same boat.” However, the notion of being in the same boat is actually one of the challenges that senior level leaders face and why the relationship building is even more necessary at that level. While the creation of relationships is vital for an organization, a leader at the executive level of an educational organization can feel as though “it is lonely work; very lonely.” There is a sense as an educational leader of being cut off from the rest of the organization. For one leader, “it’s a very isolated profession and finding people you can trust is very difficult.” For some, a lack of supportive, encouraging relationships is why “people aren’t very happy sometimes.” Finally, relationships necessary because through them as leaders “we begin to create change by helping each other think differently.”

How, then can a leader begin to build these relationships? Leaders acknowledge that “we have to work very hard to build the connections.” For one superintendent it is as simple as “try[ing] to get out and see the staff daily.” While he may not accomplish that on a daily basis, at the minimum he desires to be as “visible as possible.” One leader indicated that he builds relationships and enjoys taking time to work with and learn from those leaders in his district whom he has

hired. Other strategies can be more complex and can be embedded in professional development. "I'm very proud of the professionalism of the staff and their collegiality. The way we have set up k-12 study-buddies has been just remarkable for the staff in their developing close relationships with each other so that an elementary teacher knows what a middle school teacher is doing and going through and also a high school teacher." In a less obvious sort of manner in this circumstance, developing relationships appears to be facilitated by learning what it is like to "walk in another's shoes." Finally, there are even opportunities provided that specifically brings a group of leaders together for extended periods of time that can facilitate relationship development. One leader shared, "we have leadership retreats for the principals and superintendents throughout the year and then in the summer we have leadership institutes."

Relationships appear to have benefits as well. Trusting relationships are more than a "nicety" to have that makes people feel good. One superintendent articulated a "bottom line" reason for developing relationships when he said, "I think the most important component of excellence is building relationships that you need to become successful." Another leader echoed that you "build a relationship you need to build, to become successful. Positive relationships have a benefit to wide audiences in a school community. One superintendent wants "to build the climate in the building where the kids and faculty and parents and the senior citizens that come in as helpers all feel that this is a good place to be." For another superintendent, positive relationships were foundational in effective teamwork and served as a source of personal pride. "My greatest joy as an

educational leader is seeing how our administrative team and staff work so well together.” It appears that positive collegial and personal relationships impact the effectiveness of teamwork. Another benefit is the unleashing of the potential of staff members.

There are also personal benefits to relationship building for leaders, to which one leader attributed her longevity in her current position. “The reason I’ve stayed here so long – good community relations, good staff relations, and a lot of trust built up.” There are indeed powerful measurable, tangible benefits to strong relationships in educational leadership as well as those that equally powerful and intangible.

However, it is not only trust relationships between individuals within the same organization that is a function of excellent work. In the world of education with financial restraints and high expectations for student achievement placed upon schools, relationships developed with outside organizations and individuals can help better meet the needs of students. As one individual insightfully put it, “...you create enough strategic alliances with a common understanding and people keep moving forward, and thus the needs of the kids are met.”

To summarize, developing caring and trusting relationships seems to create a sense of openness and an environment where connections are made between people, encouraging a creative sense of risk-taking and ownership. Relationships are necessary because of the isolation and loneliness of leadership and because they result in tangible and intangible benefits for educational organizations. The thoughts of the individuals interviewed for this

study communicate both the desire for and positive impact of developing and maintaining relationships as a theme of doing excellent work in educational leadership.

### *Leadership*

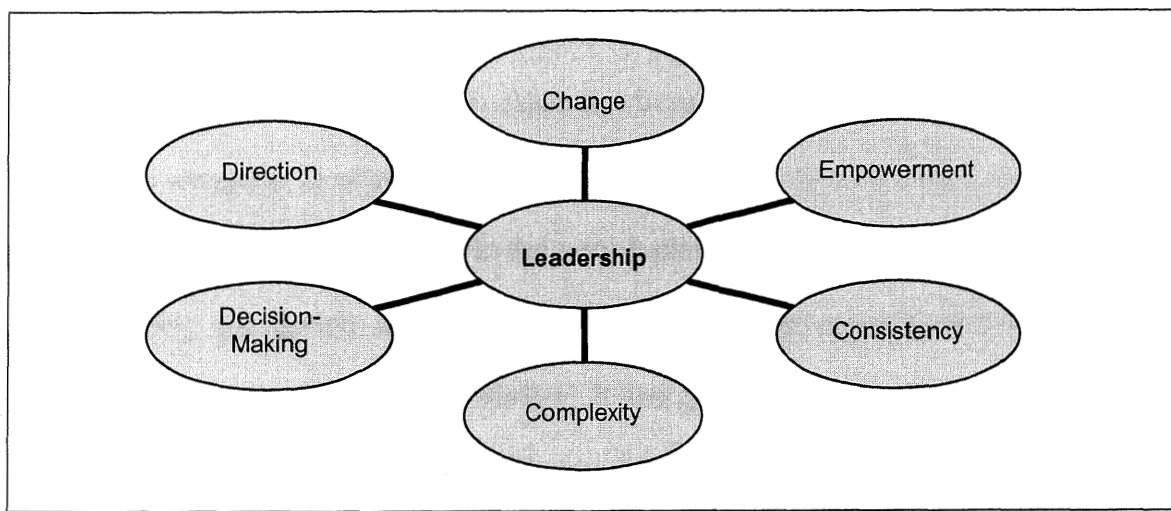
Given the fact that individuals were selected for this study by virtue of their standing as educational leaders, it is not surprising that leadership would evolve as another theme of what it means to do excellent work. One leader shared this in no uncertain terms. “I guess I think to do excellent work is to provide the positive leadership for the educational setting you are in, no matter if it’s as principal, or a superintendent.” Echoing the same commitment and resolve supporting the necessity for strong school leadership a superintendent shared, “to me excellent work is taking a look at what kind of leadership you have provided for a school system that’s providing for improving instruction and improving student achievement.” Varying levels of complexity describing leadership were expressed. One succinctly shared that leadership simply was the opportunity to fulfill the greatest expectations of others.

As a result of my analysis, several themes within leadership emerged including direction, empowerment, decision-making, working with complexity, change, and consistency. These themes are supported by the general comments, specific quotes, and stories shared by each of the interviewees. However leadership is characterized, either in complex or more straightforward terms, leadership today in schools is no less than an absolute necessity. As one

leader so aptly stated, "right now, probably more than any time in the past, we have a need for strong leadership in the school."

Given the significance of leadership in this study, its major themes have been illustrated in Figure 3.

*Figure 3. Themes of Leadership*



### *Direction.*

According to several of the interviewees, providing direction and identifying important issues were paramount to providing successful leadership. Setting direction was seen as a requisite for a school to change and grow to meet student needs. Providing direction, however, was not necessarily a task a leader would do in an isolated unilateral fashion. Corresponding to the emergence of transformational leadership as the prevalent leadership theory today, time after time these leaders spoke of the need to work with stakeholders (both outside of and within their organizations) to identify the issues most crucial to address. Providing opportunities to develop shared goals was an important

aspect of leadership. One superintendent offered, "if you don't have a work environment that is conducive to developing some kind of shared goals about what you are doing and the importance of the work, you can't get from point A to point B." As this collaborative approach to leadership and the development of vision emerged as a leadership theme, one superintendent put it, within the context of a character development initiative in his district, "Our citizenship, or character program was not even close to where I thought it would be a decade ago. Had we gone to what I thought would be, where my own vision was, we probably would have ended up in the wrong place." He went on to say "I think by empowering the system and the people who really have a vested interest in our community to help direct that [initiative], it has gotten us to a better place because now the community is really into it." I found this sense of honesty and humility refreshing and it demonstrated to me that it was not important to this superintendent who came up with the idea (in this case regarding the direction of the character/citizenship initiative). What mattered most was creating and implementing a plan that was beneficial to students and had the support of the community he serves, regardless of whose idea it was. He amusingly added, in a self-deprecating use of humor, "I'm glad I wasn't navigating for Columbus or we never would have discovered America!"

### *Empowerment.*

The concept of the leader not being solely responsible for the development of the vision and direction connects the need for developing relationships and providing direction. Groups and individuals can be empowered



to help set direction for a school. However, trust built upon a foundation of strong relationships is a prerequisite. Once a level of trust is developed, empowerment becomes a natural outgrowth. In an upward growth spiral, trust and empowerment can mutually evolve. The greater the trust, the greater the empowerment; the greater the positive results from empowerment, the greater the trust.

The significance of empowerment was supported by several of the interviewees. One executive director who had served through the ranks as teacher, principal, and superintendent shared that “if you’re in a profession or an enterprise where people are mission driven, then the task of leadership, aside from helping to build consensus and understanding and learning about what the directions needs to be, is to give those people who are trying to make it happen the help they need to make it happen.” There are multiple layers of benefits when a leader engages in building a shared vision. Building shared vision creates greater commitment on the part of individuals and creates a sense of team. Working in empowered teams creates synergy, in which the team as a whole learns more and produces more than the sum total of what they could have as individuals.

Another superintendent stated humbly that “I’ve worked with some outstanding classroom teachers and support staff, and my commitment was to grant them freedom to do the good work.” Leadership style, with members of this group, was very much a function of transforming those with whom they worked into leaders unto their own right. “And that’s what our goal is,” said one leader,

“to empower teaches to take risks and feel safe...helping teachers to feel like leaders.” One superintendent even went so far as to say that an attribute of excellence in leadership is the ability of the leader to release others from their fear. “And, there’s also the thing of helping to free people from fear because I think that’s a huge, huge thing – through a million different ways of trying to free people from the bond – you know, these things that bind us. And the biggest part of that, I think is fear. So I really see that that’s what I try to accomplish in my work, and I think once that thing is gone, I know that people will want to learn.”

By focusing on higher leverage activities such as developing shared vision and shared values these leaders seek to empower others to better meet the needs of an ever-changing population of students. At its best an empowering leadership can facilitate effective connections between students and teachers, ultimately resulting in quality teaching and learning opportunities between teacher and students. “That’s when everything works...that’s when teachers feel that sense of efficacy because the kids are learning.”

#### *Decision-making.*

A few years back I was visiting with a friend regarding the organizational structure of the company for whom he worked, a major insurance company with a traditional hierarchical structure. We talked about the vast decisions that were made on a day to day basis. A pattern that existed in this organization was that the higher one moved throughout the organizational structure, the less decisions leaders had to make. However, he pointed out that his supervisor had once told

him that while he doesn't necessarily make a large quantity of decisions, the ones he did make had major significance for the corporation.

The concept of decision making was another piece of the "leadership pie" as it relates to doing excellent work. "Excellence," as one individual put it, "I think, is dependent on the decision-making process that you put into place." Educators in leadership positions, like their counterparts outside of education, may not make as many decisions on a daily basis as say a teacher might. However, given the systemic impact of, as an example, a superintendent's decisions, the influence can be felt throughout the entire schools system and even the community at large. "The thing I notice," said one superintendent of a district in northern Iowa, "about the superintendency is that there may be less quantity of decisions, but it is imperative that you make real quality decisions because it impacts so many people in such a vast area." Given the leverage and impact of decisions made by educational leaders, it raises the question of just how one goes about making sound quality decisions. In his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1994), Heifetz indicates that "authorities commonly have the power to choose the decision-making process" (p. 121) and this process can shape not only the culture of the organization, but also the quality of the decisions that are made. The same superintendent from northern Iowa provided insight into that when he told me "so when we talk about excellent work, I think the burden falls upon the individual, the leader of any organization to be well grounded, to do their homework; so that he can, along with the brain trust that many consider to

be the group that they rely on, make the very, very best decision to move forward.”

At the very same time, making the actual decisions is not the sole responsibility of the leader. Related to the previous topics of trusting relationships and empowerment, a leader also holds the ability to allow others to participate in decision making. When a leader has engaged in the high leverage activities of facilitating and establishing values such as shared visioning and shared decision making, and when there is an alignment of fundamental beliefs among staff members, the fruits of these efforts are tangible. Following a severe car accident involving one of his children, one superintendent needed to spend time at his child’s hospital bedside, causing him to be away from school for extended periods of time, often returning late at night to catch up on paperwork. During his absences the district did not come to a standstill. Rather, because of the climate that had been established, staff was empowered to make decisions and during that time “they [the staff] did not make a bad decision in my absence. They sometimes made different decisions than I would have made, but none of them were bad.”

While it can be “lonely at the top” and a place where as Harry S. Truman once said, “the buck stops,” individuals providing excellence in leadership take time to research, think, consider process, and listen to the counsel of others before making significant decisions that will impact a large number of stakeholders. One leader found that creating time for decision making was critical, due to the fragmentation of a leader’s work schedule. For as he shared,

“now, how many critical decisions have you made in your life when you’re thinking about it for 20 minutes?”

For one leader, decision making was a high leverage opportunity to improve student achievement. As a former superintendent of a nationally high achieving school district in which education was valued and strongly supported by the community, he still found that “about 20% of the kids didn’t really succeed well.” A decision was made to undertake several structural changes in staff development, and in a period of years following intensive staff development focused on improving instruction there were “phenomenal results in student outcomes.” This would not have been the case had this individual not made the decision to make significant changes in instructional pedagogy.

Decision making is a high leverage activity for educational leaders. Whether making decisions individually, seeking the advice and information from others, or empowering others to make decisions, leaders ultimately create the structures and processes. At the most fundamental level effective decision making is crucial for education. One superintendent elegantly illustrated the significance and urgency of our decisions within the context of the current structure of our school year in Iowa when he said, “[remember] we only get these little guys for 180 days a year.”

*Working with complexity.*

One of the interviewees who serves as an executive in an educational support organization shared that to really understand a leader, one must observe the behaviors and decisions of that person over a period of time and, similarly as

I am attempting to do through this research, find themes that emerge as a way of determining the leadership style and beliefs of that individual. If it takes this sort of analysis to truly understand a leader, it speaks to the complexity of leadership. This ability to see and work with complexity was another characteristic of leadership that emerged from the interviews as doing good work does require a leader to deal effectively with complexity. As Fullan (2001) writes,

We demand that [leaders] solve, or at least manage, a multitude of interconnected problems that can develop into crises without warning; we require them to navigate an increasingly turbulent reality that is, in key aspects, literally incomprehensible to the human mind (p. 2).

I recall in my own experiences prior to becoming an elementary principal, when I met with a practicing principal in our district as a means of helping me to better understand what is required to be an effective leader. I remember vividly that, in her opinion, the most important skill or ability a principal must have to be effective is the ability to deal with ambiguity and complexity, given the nature of the job.

How complex is education? One executive director provided a glimpse into the vast complexity of education in our country and its connection to the very essence of our society. "I think the reason we started this whole experiment in universal education for everyone is that we believed that it was the foundation for a democracy." Educational leadership is complex because education is a complex foundational system that serves as a fundamental support for our democratic way of life.

By recognizing the complexity of leadership, one can begin to develop skills that can improve our ability to work more effectively with it. This enhancement of skill in working with complexity provides opportunities to also reap great rewards, for as one superintendent shared with me, "and that [leading and supporting others] can be complex; it can take a very long time. But it can also make a huge difference."

Even the way in which questions about excellence were answered demonstrated the complexity of leadership. None of the individuals whom I interviewed rattled off lists of items that described excellence. As I re-read responses and looked at the content of what was said, the structure of the language and thoughts used to convey meaning, and the essence of what it meant to do high quality work, it became evident that "good work" in educational leadership, was a complex topic. The responses to the excellence question were not necessarily linear because even as one might begin a particular thesis or train of thought, the examples and explanations provided were never isolated or disconnected from other issues. Examples and explanations were embedded with connections between multiple issues and perspectives. Following is a short excerpt from one interview in response to the question of what it means to do excellent work as an educational leader. This is a representative example from the group, illustrating the complexity of the topic as it relates to educational leadership.

Well, I think it's a lot of things. It's.....I'm increasingly coming to believe that the clarity of focus is really what you want to accomplish and a

willingness to stick with that. And I also believe that it's much easier to do in education. I've learned that if you advocate for needs of students, for example; if you're clear about that you allow the ways that those needs to be met to vary. It's often true in education and sometimes in government and business – it's more compelling and connected in education, if you can find ways to advocate for the needs of kids and figure out what the designs are that can best meet those needs. It turns out that if you're work for the needs of kids you're also doing things for teachers – doing what's really important.

Peter Senge would most likely refer to excellence in educational leadership as an example of dynamic complexity, "where cause and effect are subtle, and where the effects over time...are not obvious" (Senge, 1990, p. 71). Members of the study implicitly understood and communicated this concept of dynamic complexity. One individual noted that "the greater impact you hope to have often times, not always, but often times; the longer it takes to make it happen." Most educational leaders do not work directly with students to affect change. In being further removed from where learning occurs, leaders are faced with the more complex tasks of creating optimal conditions where teaching and learning can occur. Leaders are the designers of "the kinds of support systems that teachers need to help kids be better learners." Leaders know that in most cases there is not a simple quick-fix solution to address the multifaceted demands of our schools. As one leader concisely and accurately stated, "you can't [just] change the schedule to make a difference." As the demands of



education have become more complex over time, so have the requirements for educational leadership. One leader cites the increasing demands of working in an increasingly complex educational system and the need for leaders to understand and effectively interface with it. "I came through an educational system where educational leaders just managed and ran things...But the broader definition of it [leadership] really meant going deep and understanding the consequences, either recognized or unintended, of our actions."

As these findings continue to unfold, the understanding of the connectedness of the different aspects the concepts of good work become evident first implicitly, then become explicit as they are understood. Within this subsection on leadership, connections can be made between each of the attributes described. Direction, empowerment, decision making, change, and consistency don't take place independent of one another. As an example a leader may wish to provide more decision making opportunities for staff. This is done through empowering the staff, based on an understanding of the direction, or shared vision, which has been agreed upon and is supported by the staff itself. Leadership is not linear. It is inundated with complexity. A leader's effectiveness is a function of his or her ability to recognize and understand complexity and interact with it competently in a way that ultimately impacts student learning.

### *Change.*

In Iowa there is a saying that if you don't like the weather, wait a couple of minutes and it will change. I recall that so often people will say that the only constant in the world is change. Change is the attribute of living things and

organizations are no less resistant to it. Numerous books have been written on educational change and with good reason. As society and its needs change, schools must be ready to make accommodations to meet these changes. As an example of change, over the past ten years the school at which I serve has nearly tripled in its percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunches. It is no wonder that serving as a change agent came up as another attribute of leadership. Put succinctly and powerfully by one of the interviewees, "As a leader our job is to lead change. You don't need leaders unless you're trying to change something." However, despite the need to have schools that can adapt to meet the ever-changing needs of the children and families we serve, being a "change agent" is not without its risks. In their book *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (2002), Heifetz and Linsky reveal dangers of leading change including upsetting others, risking people's ire, and making oneself vulnerable. In essence, "exercising leadership can get you in a lot of trouble" (p. 2).

Yet despite this "trouble" every single person interviewed spoke, either directly or indirectly about the need for schools to adapt to better meet the needs of the students they serve. Each indicated there had been times which were challenging for them personally and professionally. In one incident a superintendent shared the initial turmoil he faced having changed the culture of basketball games by closing the concession stands during the game and opening them only during half time to encourage greater support and participation from the fans. Closing a concession stand certainly does not seem to rise to the same

level of importance as some other pressing social or political issue such as the war on terrorism. However, he “tinkered” with tradition and while in the greater scheme of things closing a concession stand doesn’t seem like a major change, it did raise the ire of community members, even though it was for a very worthy purpose. (As a follow-up, the community did get through the initial discomfort of this change and it has created a stronger sense of purpose for fans and support for athletic teams.) Despite the challenges, Heifitz and Linsky tell us that “leadership is worth the risk because the goals extend beyond material gain or personal advancement. By making the lives of people around you better, leadership provides meaning in life” (2002, p. 3).

Leading change is dangerous because often times it may not be what people think they want. Nearly everyone has experienced the educational system and their perception of what education should be may be predicated on and trapped in the past. Attempting to make changes can literally challenge a person’s deeply held values, resulting in potential conflicts. Leaders must sometimes advocate for changes in learning opportunities “that may not always be what is most popular.” A leader may also have to be approachable to new ideas as well to effect change. As one leader put it, “you have to listen and be open to different possibilities as someone changes.” This same leader also cautions us to remember that “what changes is not static, so you have to be open to that.” Change, it seems, is the only constant.

Leaders talked about leading changes that were less topical and more fundamental in nature. One leader noted that real change “would not be talking

about block scheduling or Character Counts! or many of those things.” Rather, we need to look at fundamental change because “we are very past due in making reforms we need to make. The profile of achievement in this state hasn’t changed significantly in 50 years. That’s an embarrassment.” Because “we know such much more about how children learn,” there is a consistent belief that we should change and implement new instructional strategies that “give them [teachers] the powerful strategies that can ensure their kids succeed.”

External changes have significantly impacted the work of leaders. Over the past several years, due in part to the impact of No Child Left Behind (2002) there have been changes made in the way schools function. This change for the schools impacts the leaders as well. “One thing that has probably taken place is to actually bring about more accountability in our work.” While no leader expressed concern with the idea of accountability, it is the methodology for this accountability, as shall be explained later in this paper, which causes consternation.

Creating, coordinating, and managing change are functions of leadership. The need for educational change is real, as are the challenges and dangers. Educational leaders need continually to support learning environments that are open to and flexible enough to not only make changes that are mandated , but to also be forward-thinking enough to initiate change based on the needs of the learners.

### *Consistency.*

Related to leadership the concepts of a leader's personal and professional qualities surfaced. Two of those qualities are predictability and consistency.

"[The] consistency that whether a child is in your elementary school or the elementary school down the road or the middle school, is the excellence that defines our work surrounded by a level of predictability and consistency of behaviors." Other qualities also included a true commitment to students and their families. It's about "commitment to students, about respect for families and their needs and their differences and what they bring to us, not just what we have for them." One leader took this commitment to consistency of service to students very much to heart and shared, "I think it [excellence] means you have an obligation to serve every child whether or not they fit into what our expectations are of them."

Consistency seems to be rooted in a constancy of purpose. Because in education, "we are in a field that is mission driven," this constancy of purpose serves as an anchor for one's actions. When a set of beliefs are firmly established they guide an individual's behaviors. One leader shared the humility of learning from others as a way to stay connected to purpose. "Everything I have learned in the past from the students and the teachers has helped me to keep on track with what's important."

Consistency is not just doing the same thing over and over regardless of circumstances. A fundamental way to verify consistency is to compare one's actions with one's beliefs, or the beliefs of the organization. Leaders are called

upon at times to make decisions that may not be popular, yet that are consistent with a district's belief system expressed through board policy. In one fast-growing school district, a policy exists that sets class size limits in the elementary schools. This at times creates a conflict between the concepts of neighborhood school and class size. Consistency in dealing with this issue has guided the district, but it has not come without challenge. Parents become angry when they realize, because of class size limits, they cannot send their children to the nearby neighborhood school. "They [new parents] make it a big issue and the board has never granted an exception." In this case this superintendent and school board have ruled, with consistency, that the protection of small class size takes precedence over attending one's designated neighborhood school. At the same time, parents who have lived through this situation have been very satisfied with the quality of education their children have received outside of their neighborhood school, which may be in part due to the small class size. In most cases room did become available for their child to return to their neighborhood school. In another district it has been important for the superintendent to address concerns about transitions that occur as a result of rapid enrollment growth. For this superintendent consistency is important to "keep that [learning environment] as stable and as predictable and calm as we can, so that they [students] don't feel as though they're in a rapidly changing environment." For another leader, consistency with and respect for tradition is significant because for him in the face of change (consolidation), "we also have some real strong heritage issues" that are highly valued by the communities involved. So in consolidation

proceedings, remaining steadfast to these values was a significant aspect of the process to merge school districts.

Consistency over time with regard to leadership is being challenged in today's educational environments. This consistency of leadership, stated contextually, used a comparison to the world of professional baseball. "Gone are the days of Harmon Killebrew who started out with one team and stayed with that team his whole career. And I'm not saying that everybody should be landlocked into their profession; but the commitment I wish we could make as professionals is that 'I'm here; I'm called here for a reason. I'm going to fulfill the call before I move on'." Consistency in educational leadership emerges in multiple ways. It is in creating consistency of behavior tied to constancy of purpose amidst the multiplicity of changes, that leaders find it most effective and useful.

#### *Student Need and Achievement*

Upon completion of the ten interviews and the subsequent analysis of data, a focus on student achievement was the single-most talked about subject as it related to doing excellent work. None of the main interview or follow-up questions related directly to student achievement, but it was the over-arching theme throughout the entire data collection process.

Fundamentally, the leaders were focused on meeting student needs, whatever they might be. A director of one of the state's educational support organizations stated strongly that "you advocate for learning opportunities through the kinds of support systems that teachers need to help kids be better learners."

While there was an obvious focus on student achievement, leaders also cited other issues that impacted student achievement, while at the same time were issues in need of solving on their own merit. Demonstrating an understanding of the needs of a “whole” child which are generally considered to be intellectual, physical, social, and emotional, one leader also folded in an understanding of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs when he stated, “you advocate for kids to be safe, because you can’t learn when you’re not safe. Some kids may really need someone to know they’re safe.”

An understanding of the impact of the pre-school years was also demonstrated and conveyed a sense of frustration when confronted with the disconnect that existed between the expectations for high student achievement and the impact of an impoverished pre-school formative years. One superintendent commented “kids who haven’t had opportunities start so far behind the start line and they [educational bureaucrats] expect them to catch up in school.”

Nonetheless, a focus on achievement was a strong theme and was recognized fundamentally as the “bottom line” measurement of what it means to do excellent work. One superintendent summed it up when he said, “ultimately, it’s [doing excellent work] helping kids to achieve goals.”

Meeting student needs is accomplished through student-driven leadership actions. An executive director spoke with great passion and commitment about what I might describe as a moral obligation to do excellent work in meeting student needs. “I think that [doing excellent work] means you have an obligation



to serve every child whether or not they fit into what our expectations of them are, in terms of their behaviors or values.” Another executive director emphasized this zeal for commitment to meet student needs when he shared, “there are so many kids falling through the cracks and the gap is so big; so for me I have a hard time understanding why it is so difficult committing to excellence.”

While making sure basic student needs were met, as both a matter of moral educational necessity, efforts to impact student achievement was a major component of excellence in leadership. Comments evoked the concept of instructional leader, which aligns with current leadership and student achievement literature. “Right now, probably more than anytime in the past, we have a need for strong leadership in schools.” As the demographics of students have changed within our society and schools, the needs of learners have changed as well. Today’s educational leaders are faced with the task of meeting student needs today that either did not exist before, or existed in such small percentages that they did not greatly impact schools. As one director put it, “you have to be a much better principal now than your colleagues did 20 years ago. It isn’t ‘Ozzie and Harriet’ any more.”

The focus on instructional leadership was one component cited by Ron Edmund’s effective schools research. Responses from the interviewees supported this idea with their comments providing some concrete ideas of what it means to be an instructional leader.

"I'm increasingly coming to believe that the **clarity of focus** [boldface added for emphasis] is what you want to accomplish and a willingness to stick with that. That's pretty essential." This need for focus was reinforced as one organization's director shared his experience about one particular school district with which his organization works, had 131 initiatives at one point in time.

Now how would you even manage that? And if you got results, how would you know which one of those things got you the result? I mean it's ludicrous. And yet, that's not uncommon. That's absolutely not uncommon. I mean you can think back to your experience, how many times do you have three or four or five or six things that people want you to do well and it's so hard to manage and I think that's one of the problems with current day administration is that people have so many balls in the air they're spending 16 hours per day trying to keep them up there. And you need to bring it back into focus...what counts? Let's get to the core.

In addition to clarifying what's most important and providing focus to that, an instructional leader has the opportunity, if not obligation in order to improve student achievement, to set and create conditions that support these efforts. "When I talk about excellence, that's creating a school system where the conditions are right and everyone learns and everyone excels." The establishment of the conditions, as a role of leadership, is analogous to the concept of a systems approach in education. Fundamentally, a leader might ask, "What causes the patterns of behavior [achievement]?" (Senge, 1990, p. 53). By

asking such questions a leader is beginning to explore the fundamental, yet often unexplored nature of systems.

As an example supporting Senge's belief that "event explanations are the most common in contemporary culture" (p. 52), nearly every subject either alluded to or directly mentioned No Child Left Behind as an issue facing education today. However, their comments spoke to this well-intentioned initiative as more of an "event" than a systemic structure which would fundamentally impact the conditions for enhancing student achievement. Excellent work may be accomplished by leaders who create effective conditions for learning by constructing the underlying structures through a systems approach. Or as one leader put it, "figure out what the designs are that can best meet those needs [of students]."

Effective leaders doing excellent work also focus on instruction. "To me, excellent work is taking a look at what kind of leadership you have provided for that school system that's providing for the improvement of instruction and improving student achievement." Supporting that idea is the need for leaders and all educators to keep abreast on the topic of current research and literature in the area of learning. "I think one of the things we do poorly in education is to understand what the research says to us. And if we understood that, we would then understand what of all of that 'stuff' is truly important."

Yet, serving as an educational leader in a formal sense also includes a myriad of managerial tasks to be completed. From budgets, buses, and buildings to personnel, printing, and procedures educational leaders, such as

superintendents, within a system are confronted with issues that directly impact the system, not all of which that may directly impact student achievement. One might argue that transporting students to school safely each day has a significant influence on student achievement. However, amidst the managerial tasks required to operate a school district, it is with the ability to focus on the process of curriculum development, teaching, and learning that several leaders cited as components of providing excellent instructional leadership.

The ability to effectively manage change was cited earlier as a component of effective educational leadership. Yet, amidst the constant challenges of initiating and managing change, an ability to create a consistency of experiences was also cited as an important factor. Change and consistency are not polar opposites, nor do they necessarily imply a dichotomy. One leader used an interesting, yet simple example to illustrate the importance, if not necessity of routine and consistency for human beings. "As human beings we like a certain amount of routine. We would not be happy if we were in a hurry and going up a flight of steps and suddenly some architect had decided that steps were going to have different tread heights. We would be tripping, falling, and injuring our selves because we would usually like to assume that there would be relatively uniform heights whether it was a new building [or an old one]." Creating this stability can be facilitated, as one superintendent put it by "articulating K-12 consistency across buildings." One executive director felt it was imperative for leaders to develop this consistency for students throughout any school system, and

illustrated the point by sharing the insightful perspective that “students are the only ones who experience the entire system.”

Whatever the impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Public Law 107-110, 2002) has been on schools, within the framework of excellence, leaders cited accountability as a necessary aspect of student achievement. In citing changes that have occurred impacting educational leaders, one superintendent commented “one thing that has probably taken place is the need to actually bring more accountability to our work.” What most of the leaders cited as positive about NCLB was its fundamental focus the accountability for student achievement. One former superintendent who now serves at a director’s level in an educational support organization punctuated this need for accountability as a necessity in knowing how our students are performing, and stated with a passionate indignation, “When a third of our kids in our state, one of the most homogenous and a state that values education – when a third of our kids are left behind that’s a shame and we need to do something about that.”

This accountability includes not only student achievement results, but an accountability of our efforts relative to being involved in the public arena, supported by the moneys of taxpayers. One leader shared passionately the importance of her accountability to the public in terms of her own efforts. “As an educator and public servant using tax payer dollars, I can’t do anything but excellence. It’s like you’re getting paid to do this work, so I shouldn’t do it half-way.”

Doing “excellent work” as an educational leader, as shared by the thoughts of participants in this study, is carried out through numerous behaviors in a variety of settings. Analyzing these behaviors surfaced more fundamental themes for engaging in excellent leadership. These themes included developing and maintaining relationships, providing leadership, and focusing on student achievement.

That fundamental aspects of excellence (relationships, leadership and focus on student needs and achievement) exist in educational leadership is no longer in question. What is now compelling to ascertain is the answer to the question of what enables, supports, and encourages these behaviors of excellence to be present in educational leadership.

### *Supporting and Encouraging Excellence*

Interviews revealed that while we still may struggle with definitions of excellence, it may be identified as a result of behaviors in which it is foundational. Fundamentally, it's not what excellence is; it's what it does.

How is excellent work supported? Following an acknowledgement of the need for supports, interviewees cited supports that were formal, could be found from within and outside of one's organization and included relationships and influential individuals

### *Necessity*

But what supports the efforts to engage in and accomplish excellent work? Are there observable supports for doing excellent work, or are there unseen generative systemic structures which support such efforts? While these

questions are an important part of the study, there may be a more fundamental question to ask as it relates to supporting and encouraging excellence in educational leadership: Is it necessary?

While not a focus of this particular study, the theme relating to the isolation of educational leadership emerged unexpectedly through the interviews. School leadership, according to one interviewee, "is a lonely business." Often times the school superintendent is the only one of his or her kind in their community. While there may be others professionals who occupy positions of similar status, such as chief executive officers of companies, doctors, and even clergy "there isn't anybody else in your community that walks the same walk you do. Clergy have other clergy to turn to. Doctors have other doctors. There are no other superintendents." According to one interviewee, recent work by AASA (American Association School Administrators), NASSP (National Association Secondary School Principals), and NAESP (National Association Elementary School Principals) has highlighted this condition of isolation among educational leaders, commenting on issues such as loneliness at the top, self care, and the embattled principal. In a profession whose craft was described by one as "lonely, lonely work," it would seem all the more reason to have ways to support the pursuit of excellence in leadership.

However, it is not only because of this isolation that a need exists to support excellence in the work of educational leaders. The requirements of the job place a heavy demand on effective skill sets as well as personal fortitude of each leader. As one superintendent put it, "I don't think we can ever prepare

people well enough to do this job.” One administrator was not particularly complimentary of the efforts of school leaders to engage in growth opportunities when he said, “you know, I don’t think administrators do a real good job of picking up what’s out there.” Yet another provided a perspective, suggesting that because of the quality of educational leaders who place such a high value on excellence and continuous improvement, these ideals inherently trigger the need for more growth opportunities. “People, typically those people that I would look at as having reached the highest level of the profession are the very people that would....that are pushing out to the next frontier; the next set of expectations.” among educational leaders in Iowa, this individual noted, “There’s openness to improvement.”

From professional isolation and loneliness, to the need to do a better job of seeing what’s out there in terms of growth opportunities, to the drive for continuous improvement because “excellence is not an end state,” and “it [educational leadership] is a human enterprise where perfection is always a bit off,” support and encouragement towards excellence appear to be necessary actions as identified by educational leaders in this study. Finally, as one person put it, supporting excellence “is a very important thing to do. It’s a validating process of fulfilling desires in which learning is a must.”

Excellence, as shared by the participants of this study, is supported and encouraged through a variety of avenues. Given the range of responses in regard to what it means to do excellent work, there is reasonableness about the assortment of supports to engage in high quality work by educational leaders.



### *Formal Supports*

By law in the state of Iowa, evaluation is required for all employees within a school district. Fundamentally, there are two aspects to this evaluation process: formative and summative. In the formative process, the evaluator gathers data based on techniques such as observations, conferences, and observing relevant artifacts. Once the formative aspect of the evaluation process is complete the summative process begins. In the summative process, the evaluator uses the data gathered to create a written evaluation for the employee. The evaluation process' main purpose is to facilitate professional growth and development. The second, but legally required function is to complete an evaluation of each employee as a determinant of their competency as an employee.

One particular interviewee viewed his evaluation process as an opportunity that supports his professional growth and encourages excellence. "What I really like about the evaluation instrument is that it focuses on the big picture, rather than the little details. [It's about] the superintendent making wise purchases, rather than 'do we have the correct number of buses or school vehicles?' They focus on teaching and learning and the whole culture and climate of the school." Each year this individual's evaluation tool, but not the results of the evaluation, is published for public consumption. In this way the community is able to know what is valued and creates an informal process of accountability between the superintendent and the community. Through this accountability and a focus on what's most important, the process and evaluation tool serve to motivate and move this individual toward greater levels of

excellence. Indicators of excellence cited by this individual were developing and maintaining high levels of trust and communication with stakeholders.

Other interviewees cited professional growth plans as a method supporting excellence. These plans are often developed in alignment with district goals and are shared with board members for both communication and accountability purposes.

### *Support from Within*

Support from within, as cited above, can come from within an organization in the form of a formal process designed to simultaneously promote growth and accountability. Others cited that in addition to this formal process, there is often in-house development that occurs. Through workshops and retreats, book study groups, and other trainings, leaders are supported and encouraged to grow to meet the increasing demands of their jobs. One superintendent has led his administrative team through a book study; another has done likewise with his school board. A leader from one of the state's area education agencies (AEA) has led a group of superintendents through a similar exercise. Each case has resulted in an enthusiastic response and appreciation for bringing the groups together in such a learning-filled and meaningful manner. As an additional benefit, working in such a collegial and collaborative fashion allows leadership teams to become closer to one another and develop stronger relationships, a topic which will be discussed later in this section.

### *Support from Without*

Numerous opportunities abound for leaders, outside of their organizations, which have been cited by participants as opportunities to grow toward greater levels of excellence. One particular organization, School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) was directly cited by nearly half of the individuals as an organization that supports professional growth. As stated in its membership brochure, the mission of SAI is to “support, encourage and develop you as an educational leader” (p. 2). Specifically identified was a year-long learning opportunity entitled, “Leading with Soul.” This program was described earlier in this paper, and its intent is to work with superintendents to explore the moral dimensions of leadership. Several of the individuals who were selected as participants in this study were participants in the Leading with Soul co-hort experience.

In addition to the Leading with Soul experience, it was noted that SAI provides multiple group learning opportunities which help to develop collegial relationships among its participants. This networking appears to be a significant activity. As described by one participant, “I think it’s [networking] a critical piece. Leaders have to find networks of colleagues and kindred spirits so they can just call them and say, ‘I know I did the right thing, but I still have people mad at me’.” Another superintendent spoke to the fact that it was important through this process of professional development to work with and “find those with whom you feel safe.” These comments reinforce a thread regarding the importance of relationships, which will be directly spoken to in the next section.

Nearly every individual also mentioned attendance at national conventions and workshops as means to develop professionally. One individual cited national board certification as an opportunity for administrators to encourage professional development on the part of teachers.

### *Relationships*

Developing and maintaining relationships emerged as a major theme of what it meant to do excellent work as an educational leader. It is not necessarily surprising that the development of relationships surfaced also as a means to support and encourage excellence. As mentioned earlier in this section, through in-house staff development and workshop opportunities as well as through more informal meetings, leadership teams can develop close, supportive relationships with one another. As several spoke to, these relationships not only support professional growth, they can also serve as a necessity for the survival of leaders.

Sometimes it can be through adversity that these relationships are even more strongly forged. A personal/professional experience of my own speaks to that. In February of 2003, a forum was being held, in the midst of a budget reduction process, to allow community voices to be heard and help anyone who might be interested in understanding the district's finances. In the midst of this forum, the audience in response to both information and misinformation they had heard, had worked itself into a passionate fervor regarding potential budget reductions. During the "open microphone" portion of the evening audience members seized the opportunity to take what I would consider "pot-shots" at the

administration. Turning away from factual information several of the audience members, including students and staff, made stinging critical and sometimes offensive remarks towards administration. While there was understandably a great deal of pent-up frustration due to the potential budget reductions, it was being expressed in a way that in my opinion was very hostile and disrespectful. Never before had I experienced such personal verbal attacks and been made to feel so unworthy by those for whom I have worked to provide positive and effective leadership. It was during that evening and the following weeks that I found great support and comfort from my administrative colleagues in our district.

In their book *Leadership on the Line*, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) provide background on and tips for staying alive through the dangers of leading. In the process of working toward excellence, it is through relationship building that educational leaders can support one another. As one administrator put it, "Our administrative team gets very, very close because we share the same battles, if you will; and we share the same scars. But we've made kind of an agreement over the years, even as we've brought new administrators in that 'nobody is going to die on a single hill by themselves.' And I think that's allowed us to move to the next level."

Through the development of relationships, modeling and mentoring has occurred, enhancing the learning curve of leaders. One superintendent cites the "close knit" relationship between all of the superintendents in his conference, in which they have "taken a great deal of pride, I think, in our professional development and learning from each other." Another superintendent said, "I'd

say I've learned from superintendents I've worked with – some people who were really influential - about how you deal with stressful situations." By listening and reciprocal sharing, excellence is promoted and relationships forged.

In summary, as Fullan points out in his book, "it's relationships that make the difference" (2001, p. 51).

### *Influential Individuals*

Sometimes support not only comes from the actions of individuals, but is a function of the individuals themselves. This is the case as well with these leaders. In this study, every interviewee, bar none, named influential individuals who had supported their development in one fashion or another. Seven individuals specifically cited their parents as being significant influences in their development as leaders of excellent quality. One leader shared how his values had been shaped by the influence of his parents, saying it was not unusual for deep and thoughtful conversations to take place at the dinner table, exploring many topics, including ethics due to the influence of his father who had served as a lawyer and then a judge. Parental work ethic was also a theme that emerged, in particular from individuals whose parents had been farmers and demonstrated what could be described as the Puritan work ethic. In addition to parents, leaders mentioned their own children and spouses as being influential in their development as leaders. Colleagues also served as sources of support and encouragement for these leaders. Yet, it is not only what the colleague can do for an individual in a technical sense; it's also the quality of the relationship that is formed between individuals.

As previously mentioned, relationships are a strong source of support and encouragement for these individuals. One executive director named a colleague she met in her first year of teaching, who at age 72 became an influential colleague who provided insight that can only be gained through years of experience. Mentioned eleven different times throughout the interviews, colleagues appear to serve as a great source of support for these leaders.

Some leaders benefit by the efforts of experts whose works they read and learn from. Specifically, one respondent named educational leaders and writers Benjamin Bloom, John Carroll, and William Spady as being significant professional influences. At the same time, another cited historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln as influences because of the character and excellence they exhibited in their lives.

Former teachers were mentioned seven times as influential people in the lives of the leaders. One superintendent recounts the experience when he had moved during his high school career, to a farm that required him to change school districts. Being out in the country on a farm, he had no transportation to town and consequently would be unable to participate in football. On the first day of pre-season practice, his new high school principal, a gruff-on-the-outside mountain of a man at six feet six inches and 350 pounds stopped by his house to pick him up and take him to practice, an event that was to be repeated daily for the entire football season, providing him an opportunity to participate and develop friendships with his teammates. Years later when this leader had the opportunity to ask his former principal why he had done such a thing for him, his

response came in the form of two questions and a comment: "Would you have been able to play ball if I hadn't done that? Would you have been able to make friends in the school district you moved into if you hadn't been in the core group? Well, that's why I did it, but don't tell anybody!" The act of this educator whose gruff exterior masked a caring heart, strongly influenced a commitment on the part of this leader that "kids shouldn't be left out and every kid should have an opportunity," resulting in a no-cut policy in his district for all school activities. Another individual cited his debate coach in high school "who showed me it was okay to be smart instead of funny." These comments reveal the influence educators have with their students and urges educators, possibly as a symbol of good work, to consider the far-reaching impact of their influence on the youth in our schools.

Finally, caring friends were included as supports for these individuals. Friends, "who have your best interests in mind" and "who want the best for you" appear to play an important role in supporting excellent work by these leaders. One individual (who is now in her 50s) described a significant long-time friendship. About this friend who is currently a first grade teacher she said, "we've been best friends since ninth grade, so you know she has been there for me all the time. I've just been very blessed."

Whether it is friends, colleagues, former teachers, or family members, leaders have been and continue to be encouraged and supported, personally and professionally by people influential in their lives.



*Modeling, Reciprocating Leadership, Efficacy, and Expectations*

Several themes did emerge in regard to how excellence is encouraged and supported. At the same time, there were other ideas and statements that did not necessarily fit a particular category. These “others” tend to be more informal, but still spoke to ways in which doing quality work is supported.

Modeling was one way cited as a way of both learning and teaching about excellence. Sometimes the leader models for others. “A big part for me as a leader working with principals is modeling professional growth.” Sometimes, the leader learns from whom he or she leads. “It isn’t always that the person at the top of the hierarchy is the teacher – it works both ways.” When it works both ways, one interviewee described it as reciprocating leadership. “You know all this stuff is reciprocal anyway. We have to have teacher leadership in order to have principal leadership work. You have to have principal leadership to have superintendent leadership work. So, everybody’s got a reciprocal role with each other and most of it’s either pressure or support, or both to make the jobs happen.”

Among the leaders interviewed there existed an expectation of excellence for their work. The expectation existed among the leaders, but was also expressed as an expectation from others and from the system for them to perform at high levels of quality work. For some, there was not even the slightest question about the quest to do work; it was inherent, almost, from this person’s upbringing. Also from these leaders there existed a self-efficacy, belief in

themselves, and inner drive that compelled them to do their best work and look for ways, whatever they may be, to improve.

Finally, one superintendent indicated almost a moral obligation to give back to the profession, to help others learn and grow. She said, "The profession's been good to me. I've loved it and had a good life and I want to contribute to it in some way." She added, "When we grow from our profession, then it leaves an obligation to do likewise."

### *Excellence Rewarded*

Rewards, as a support and motivator for doing excellent work, received little attention and comment by several of the interviewees. Fundamentally, working in the public sector provides little if any extrinsic rewards. There are, however, organizations that recognize excellence. Some such as the Milliken Foundation provide substantial monetary awards (\$25,000) to recognized individuals. Other organizations in Iowa, such as School Administrators of Iowa recognize "Administrators of the Year" from a variety of levels within school districts, including elementary, middle school, high school, and central office. Other programs such as WHO television's "Apple for the Teacher" encourages students to nominate a teacher of choice for the award. However, these rewards exist on a small scale and are not extensive enough to reward excellence for the majority of educational leaders. However, this did not seem to create a great deal of consternation for the leaders interviewed. Essentially, most of the leaders found reward and meaning as a result of the work itself. While it may not be

extrinsic, a strong motivation for doing excellent work may be in “knowing that one has made a difference.”

### *Neutrality of Support*

“Neutrality of support” in the context of this paper means that no support exists. While there were several ways cited in which excellence was supported and encouraged in educational leadership, without solicitation the possibility that excellence was not supported emerged in conversations. A superintendent shared simply, “the first reality of that is that in all cases I don’t think that it [excellence] is...” An executive shared his view that “school boards fail superintendents by not giving them the support they need to move forward. Superintendents fail principals by not setting the bar high enough, number one, and then not providing them with the support they need and the same is true with principals and teachers.” This individual went on to say that “We do such a lousy job of supporting them (teachers), and you can take that right up the line.” Another superintendent commented, “I’m not sure of how good of job we do [in supporting excellence]. One individual even shared a concern that sometimes leaders listen to “false prophets” in the pursuit of excellence. “Well, I think there’s a ton of people out there who will lead us the wrong way. They are articulate and relate well, speak well, but may not ‘get it’.”

Several individuals said they had been the recipient of very little support to grow in their positions of leadership. One indicated, regarding the support of excellence, “I’ve had hardly any.” It was pointed out that leaders are not always encouraged to grow and try new things. Not only are leaders not always

supported, but teachers may not be as well. One person indicated that leaders are not always encouraged to grow and try new things. Another individual questioned if teaching excellence was even supported by administrators. There was even some question raised as to whether excellence in educational leadership was encouraged and supported in a structural sense, by the legislature.

Despite the incidences cited earlier when excellence is encouraged, there is evidence, through the comments of several individuals, that there is a lack of support and encouragement for excellence in educational leadership. One leader acknowledged this when she indicated that we can and do let this support slide, mainly because while it is important, there is not an apparent urgency to do so. Unfortunately, as time goes by and the needs of our society and students change, leaders may not be equipped to meet the shifting needs. This may be a classic example of the "parable of the boiled frog." The parable of the boiled frog explains that if a frog is placed in a pan of boiling water it immediately jumps out. However, if the frog is placed in a pan of water at room temperature sitting atop a heat source and the temperature is gradually turned up, the frog will do nothing; "In fact, he will even show signs of enjoying himself" (Senge, 1990, p. 22). However as the temperature of the water increases, the frog becomes complacent and groggy to the point where it is unable to climb out the pot, causing him to eventually boil. The parable of the boiled frog demonstrates an inability to "see slow, gradual processes" (p. 23). If suffering from this "learning disability," by the time an organization recognizes the danger (in the frog's case –

the boiling water; in education's case the increasing demands of society without providing ample support and encouragement for educational leaders to learn and grow) it may be too late to respond. It will be interesting to see if, because of the increasing challenges being faced, educational leadership and consequently the quality of education in Iowa are slowly brought to a boil, or whether leaders and other educators continue to be encouraged and supported in their professional development to meet these ever-increasing needs.

Excellence in educational leadership includes developing and maintaining relationships, focusing on student achievement, and leadership to implement change. The interviewees have indicated that excellence in these domains is supported by outside organizations, in-house staff development, supportive relationships, reciprocating leadership, modeling, and high expectations for excellence.

We have already seen that a lack of support for the development of excellence among educational leaders is not uncommon, from the perspective of those interviewed. In the following section this paper will explore barriers and challenges to doing excellent work from the point of view of these research cohort members.

### *Challenges to Excellent Work*

A variety of supports serve to encourage educational leaders in their efforts to carry out good work. Simultaneously there exist issues and other factors that serve to challenge a leader's ability to engage in quality work. One of the challenges lies in what was explored in the last section regarding a lack of

support. While not obvious or working directly in opposition to the tasks of leadership, a lack of support can erode a leader's ability to meet the expectations of his or her position, those individuals with whom they work and the issues with which they often interact and even struggle. As the demands upon schools grow from the ever-increasing needs of children and families a lack of growth on the part of leaders becomes its own challenge by reducing the likelihood of effectively leading educators to meet and overcome those needs. This section looks specifically into the challenges leaders face to doing good work. They include resources, politics and mandates, systemic issues, and societal factors.

### *Resources*

Barriers to engaging in excellent work exist in many forms. One of those forms is a lack of resources. Time was one resource that leaders felt impacted one's ability to engage in high quality work. "I think the pressure of time is maybe the most important now. It's the most precious commodity we have," commented one of the participants. In looking at the impact of time on an entire school system one superintendent from north central Iowa pointed out that "one of the challenges is just the time to do quality work." In a pragmatic way the constraints of time impacted the way in which his school district was organized in terms of a schedule. Traditional schools, based on an industrial notion of an assembly line model, are controlled by time allocations which have been artificially placed on schools and challenge educators by creating a structure that does not support current research regarding effective teaching. As I look at education in a holistic sense I believe we have come to understand the limitations of an educational

experience that is fragmented to meet the needs of the schedule rather than the learning needs of students. In another aspect, the restraints of school calendars and teacher contract time limit the ability of educators to engage in meaningful staff development during the school year as it pertains to meeting the specific needs of a school's students. With this limitation of the precious commodity of time and the way in which we structure activities within it, it may be argued that schools are not as effective as they might be if there was a greater resource of time to learn and grow as a staff.

The challenge of time as a resource impacts individually the leader with whom I spoke as well. Earlier it was noted that the multiple and growing demands of leadership can be challenging to a leader. One of those challenges lies in balancing the professional and personal aspects of one's life. "And then just the demands of the job, for any administrator I think if you do it well, you have to be able to separate it and not forget there's another life besides being an administrator." The demands of the job, the desire to have some semblance of a personal life, and the limitations of a 24 hour day create barriers for leaders to work with and overcome. As one individual noted, "being able to meet the job demands and have a personal life...it's hard to make that separation or have that time."

Finances also emerged as a resource that challenges a leader's work. Across the state for the past several years, districts have been forced to reduce their budgets, some even during the course of a current school year. Fewer teachers, less supplies, and less money challenge a school's ability to meet

student needs, particularly in the political climate of No Child Left Behind (2002) where education is held to greater levels of accountability for student achievement. Ultimately, educators are asked to do more with less and an organization's leader is often at the front line of making decisions that directly impact students.

One superintendent shared that "there's just not enough money provided for education. When you look at the overall growth in districts, the allowable growth hasn't been that much in recent years. So, schools are struggling to get by that way." But this is not just a situation in which education is an isolated island. From a systemic perspective public schools in Iowa are a part of a larger network and a larger economy. One executive director cited outdated economic paradigms as inhibitors of fiscal growth. "I think the greatest challenge is even when you talk to people in Iowa you know, may be that things need to be different economically." In other words, our historical economic ties to agriculture in Iowa may be a limiting factor to energizing our economy, subsequently decreasing tax revenue and support to Iowa schools.

One superintendent seemed resigned to the condition of finances in Iowa schools. "Financial issues, of course right now are big ones. But I think that it is something that is always going to be in our world, so I think you have to accept that and do the best you can with it."

A leader of an educational support organization indicated that it may not just be the current state of the economy that is impacting funding for schools. Rather, the legislative mandates that rule Iowa school finance may be equally



responsible. "Some of it is inadequate allocation of resources. I suspect, now this is not a popular thing to say, but I suspect that if you tallied up all the money that is currently ear-marked for k-12 education and removed the barriers and how you can use those moneys because of the categorical funding we have, and I bet if we assigned the best teachers to the most needy kids, we'd have higher student achievement."

Regardless of the fundamental causes, the economics of the state and the state of school budgets challenge a leader's ability to work in the way that best meets the needs of students.

#### *Politics and Mandates*

The challenges of diminishing resources and increasing demands on those resources aren't the only tests leaders face today. As an extension of state, and to some degree federal governments, public schools and school leaders are challenged by politics and mandates and a variety of "sidebar political issues."

"Right now [we are in] an era of state and federal regulations and mandates that are the most intrusive we've seen in years." The most significant federal mandate in years is the No Child Left Behind act (2002). School leaders indicate that this mandate, whose fundamental intent of meeting the needs of children in previously disregarded low performing subgroups, is an intrusive piece of legislation in its implementation and is based on a punitive system of disciplinary and retaliatory economic actions that ultimately undermine the efforts of educators to meet the needs of students. "Obviously," shared an official at one

the state's area education agencies, "the public policy, NCLB has had an effect on us, because we're in every school in our agency. If there is a school that is on a watch list, or a school in need of assistance, it's our personal quest to get them off."

Regarding the negative impact of and lack of support from Iowa's legislators, one executive director even went so far as to say, "there's a concerted effort to deny the state sufficient revenue to provide to schools...They [politicians] don't care. As long as they are getting re-elected, they don't care."

However, politics does not only challenge leaders from far-removed state and federal governmental sources. Politics are a local phenomenon as well. "[there are] politics in every school; parents and all kinds of pressures. It's how you manage in such a way that compliments what you're trying to accomplish in your core work." One superintendent espouses a need to understand the local politics of a community in order to work effectively. "It is the political pressure in any community or in any system. There is the politics of the community you have to understand."

Regardless of whether at the federal, state, or local level, politics do challenge the work of school leaders and, if not recognized and checked will have an increasing influence the day-to-day happenings in schools.

### *Systemic Issues*

Education is not an isolated institution, disconnected from other aspects of society. There are issues facing educational leaders that have potentially systemic ramifications on our schools and state, and provide challenges for

educational leaders to address and/or overcome. In reality, most if not all issues are systemic in nature because in any system or organization whether tightly or loosely coupled, concerns that impact one area tend to be connected to others. There were, however issues that seemed to have greater systemic implications.

Earlier politics and mandates were cited as barriers unto themselves. However, with the leverage and impact they carry, politics and mandates could also be labeled as systemic issues. "I think the biggest barrier to system improvement is the notion of the skepticism of the public toward public education that the legislature has right now." Leaders were concerned about this disconnect and the fact that while political rhetoric appears to be supportive of education, actions impacting economics and finances of school districts did not align with their speech-making. It's as if those who are politically influential don't fully appreciate the connectedness between what happens at the legislative and local levels. One executive director felt that there was a lack of seeing the state as one large system, of which the legislature and all schools were a part.

Systemic barriers, however, were not found only at macro levels in the state. One superintendent shared, "the biggest one [problem] is, in this district, getting the building to be a team that balances being part of the district and having their own autonomy." In this superintendent's particular district a "disconnect" existed due to the fact that several building principals perceived themselves much the same as a being the superintendent of their own school district. For a district leader, this can create considerable complications, particularly when building leaders do not acknowledge or understand their

connection to the rest of the district and how their actions impact the district as a whole. In some districts where a great deal of growth has occurred, a “disconnect” can easily occur. These disconnections cause a fragmentation within a district and challenge a leader’s ability to help move a district in a common direction. As one superintendent put it, “in our complex society we need to instill in folks a sense of belonging; a sense of community.”

### *Societal Factors*

Some leaders shared that there are forces outside the official walls of the school which impact not only their, but their teachers ability to meet student needs. External or societal issues, which can also be classified as systemic issues because of the enormous leverage they exert throughout the general public, are increasingly creating challenges for educational leaders. Essentially, as one superintendent shared, “There are just some things that make it more difficult for kids to learn nowadays.” There are some very fundamental needs that schools, with their limited resources of time and money, strive to meet daily, even before learning begins. Many wonder if meeting these needs should be the responsibility of schools. To that question, one leader remarked, “you have to remember Maslow’s hierarchy and make sure kids are safe and fed first.” In other words, until basic human physiological and safety needs are met, students will be unable to attend to other activities, such as learning. Societal changes involving families create additional challenges for leaders who work to meet student needs. “There are a whole new set of challenges that students face in that more and more families have two parents working outside the home beyond

school hours.” In addition to the need to meet basic student needs prior to their learning and changes in family structure and demands that impact children, a concern was also raised about the type and quality of media to which children are exposed. “Another challenge would be the whole notion of too much television. I really think it’s having a negative impact in learning.” These challenges represent the dynamic complexity of which education and educational leaders are a part. As a result of their complexity, not only are these issues not easily solved, sometimes their fundamental causes are not even recognized. Not recognizing the complexity of issues may be a huge barrier impacting our school leaders.

Each of the challenges identified so far; time, money, politics, systemic, and societal, are what one might categorically describe as external forces. Not coming from within an individual, these are influences that press upon leaders and make their work challenging. However, one superintendent made an observation that had a very unique way of looking at what challenges a leader’s ability to engage in excellent work. “Well, here’s my bias; I think we do it to ourselves.” Acknowledging external factors such as state and federal regulations, she indicated that, “the [real] barriers are when all they [leaders] do is get mad and rail against something that’s externally imposed, instead of saying, ‘Ok...I’m going to play the hand I’m dealt and I’m going to play it well’.” She went on to say that “I believe our reaction to them [challenges] can be a barrier of excellence.” It seems, then, from this person’s perspective that

regardless of the external challenges, the ability to engage in quality work is a function of one's choices and attitude, rather than one's circumstances.

Aside from the major themes that emerged from this section, a wide variety of assorted ideas were cited as challenges to doing good work. From a lack of both the necessary pressure and support to create and sustain change efforts, "moving away from stifling routine," the previously explored topic of job isolation, school cultures which typify the quote that "good is the enemy of the best," to living and working in environments where fear is the primary power base, there exists legitimate circumstances and dynamics that can potentially obstruct and challenge an educational leader's efforts to perform at high levels of effectiveness.

Excellence manifests itself through developing relationships, providing leadership and focusing on student needs and achievement. Supports exist formally, from within the organization, and from outside the organization. It is supported through the development of relationships, the influence of significant individuals, high expectations, and the rewards of personal and professional fulfillment. Challenges such as a lack of resources, politics and mandates, and systemic issues threaten the good work of leaders. However, despite these challenges and that of not being supported at times to the degree in which it should be supported, leaders currently are able to sustain efforts to engage in excellent work.

### *What "Does" Ethics?*

The other half of the "good work" equation examines what it means to do work in a socially responsible manner. For the purpose of this study, doing work in a socially responsible manner relates to ethics. Ethics was examined in the literature review, but fundamentally refers to a standard of conduct within the context of a system of principles. This section will investigate and seek to understand and describe the ethical work of educational leaders.

Earlier in this analysis the challenge of defining ethics in a conclusive fashion was presented. In hindsight, this challenge became almost a prophecy as the complex and elusive nature of ethics became further underscored through the interview responses. Each interviewee's answers revealed a slightly different framework for understanding ethics. Despite the distinctive viewpoint of each of the interviewees, common themes did emerge. Fundamentally, examining the ethical side of educational leadership revealed altruistic motives for choosing to serve as educational leaders.

While no one specifically defined ethics, the responses indicated that each individual possessed at some level of consciousness a construct for understanding ethical work. While there was an initial struggle to articulate what "ethics" were, no one lacked the words to articulate what it meant in a practical sense from an educator's perspective.

As public servants, such as these leaders are, working in an ethical fashion appears to be a prerequisite for service. Responding to this necessity, one leader indicated that "they [the public] need to [trust], particularly in public

service. In a reciprocal fashion, a leader then must demonstrate patterns of trustworthy behaviors."

For many, "ethical work is synonymous with moral work." And among these leaders, relative to recent federal legislation, this moral work meant "not to leave any child behind." Many saw the character of education itself as an ethical endeavor, with one individual even going so far as to say "teaching, at its core, is the most ethical of all professions, because it is the desire to make the world a better place through our progeny..." The necessity, importance, and urgency for serving as an educational leader, as indicated earlier, extends past a quest for external rewards and well beyond simply working to put food on one's table. As one individual passionately described, "this is for me about a moral imperative that says every child is entitled to the highest education possible." Being ethical in education means, "we will be child centered." Working ethically also means to be "true to the clients of your organization," whether they are students, parents, or the community. One superintendent realistically put it; ethics is "a fundamental concept of respect for one another." Being ethical also meant for a leader to be "true to one's mission." Being true to one's mission speaks to the need for consistency of behavior in relation to that mission. "So, ethics is being pretty clear about what you believe, living what you believe, not being one way to one person and a different way to someone else."

Discussions and analysis reveal that similar to excellence, ethics can be a complex concept. At the same time, it can be an exceedingly simple concept. Plainly put, being ethical for an educational leader means, "doing the right thing."



### *Moral Purpose*

Possessing a construct and a fundamental understanding of ethics is foundational for educational leaders. These beliefs serve as the underpinnings upon which all thinking, decisions, and behaviors are based and allow leaders “to be driven by values and principles.” Metaphorically speaking, similar to the unseen portion of an iceberg below the surface of the water, these values “have to drive the way you do work.” One superintendent remarked, “I think you have to be grounded in who you are, and I think you have to face virtually every decision you make grounded in who you are, as well as who the system is.” This “moral purpose” serves as a compass and begins inside each one of us.” This foundation creates a consistency of ethical actions upon which others can depend. “In leadership,” as one person put it, “you can always do what is fundamentally consistent with your beliefs and everybody that you work with knows what you believe.” Being solidly grounded in those beliefs assists a leader when it comes time to making difficult decisions, “because when you are up against a wall, that’s what’s going to help.”

These morals, or values, are not only important for leaders or other individuals. Values are equally important on a larger and more systemic scale. “Values create a set of operating principles for the organization.” These values become the bedrock of the organizations and guide its thinking, decisions, and actions as they did individual leaders, setting a tone and creating an entire culture. The superintendent of a suburban school district explained, “the value structure [of the district] has to be shared, to bind each other to principles.” While

the leader serves as a model for the district, "ethics is deeper than just an individual. I think it is also a systemic question." In other words, educational leaders, while influential, cannot go it alone. To create this culture of working in socially responsible ways, others must align with this belief and carry it forth in their own actions.

In working to provide ethical leadership, leaders believe that it is important to have a foundational belief system that guides behaviors, based on one simple question posed by one of the superintendents: "what do you believe?" Leaders interviewed don't typically make a practice of broadcasting their values. Rather, they let their beliefs guide them and allow their actions to express their morals in a tangible sense.

It is said that actions speak louder than words. However it can be a necessary action for a leader to share their beliefs and values and make them explicit. One superintendent shared the story of attending her first graduate level class on her way to becoming a school administrator. Asked by the instructor about her core beliefs and values regarding education, she could not articulate what they were. Through a process of thoughtful reflection over time she was able to define what her core beliefs were and has subsequently shared them with others. These beliefs now serve her as a foundation for all of her actions and decisions as she continually works to "live" her beliefs as well as articulate them.

While it is necessary for a leader to know and be able articulate his or her fundamental beliefs, it is through the evidence of behaviors where a leader's ethics and morals are judged. Intent is one thing; action is another. Through the

interviews there have been descriptions of specific actions that demonstrate and underscore what it means to do ethical work in educational leadership.

The leaders in this study have articulated a strong foundational sense of ethics, particularly as it pertains to their work. Through their thoughts they have also revealed the importance of a strong ethical or moral foundation, both individually and organizationally, to guide decisions and actions and to serve as an anchor during the challenging times when difficult decisions must be made.

### *Decision-Making*

If, as stated earlier in this by one school superintendent, making well-informed good decisions was a sign of excellent work, then making right decisions particularly, difficult and unpopular ones is a hallmark of ethical work. The first step to making these tough, but ethical decisions is the willingness to ask hard-hitting questions. "It is just asking those tough questions - that's the ethical part - being able to ask the tough questions." Asking those tough questions and getting honest responses leads then to making difficult decisions. Sometimes the most difficult decisions surround the quality of work and effectiveness of staff. In those situations, an ethical leader must "be really willing to say to those who aren't performing, 'you can't cut it here,' and that's tough. It takes a huge toll, but I think that's part of ethical leadership." The heart of these decisions can be uncovered by asking one simple but profound question, "What's the right thing to do for students?" One former superintendent shared an experience where he had to make a very difficult decision, but one that was in the best interests of students. "My first years as superintendent of schools, we

had a very small number of kids in football. We had some injuries and had to play a lot of freshmen. It was just a bad situation and [because of that] we had to cut the season down. Now, we did the right thing, however not everybody agreed it was the right thing, and that was very tough, especially as a working superintendent. But it's still about doing the right thing for kids, whether everybody agrees with it or not." As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) write, there are dangers that exist in leadership. However, despite the dangers, ethical leaders are called at times to make challenging decisions and in so doing put into action their fundamental belief of making decisions in the best interests of their students.

### *Transparency*

The development of effective processes can demonstrate a leader's moral principles and at the same time can strengthen the very principles in which he or she believes. Creating an environment of shared decision making and an openness to the decision-making process not only enables better decision making, but also engenders an atmosphere of trust and trustworthiness. In the difficult course of action to close a school in a community in one of Iowa's merged school systems, 64 public meetings were held to allow the voices of community members to be heard. These meetings culminated in a decision-making forum at which 500 people attended. Ultimately through a night of emotional testimonials a decision was reached, resulting in the closure of one of the district's school buildings. As one of the long-time members of the community in which the school was going to be closed left the building, he shook the hand of

the board president and said, "You know, I don't have to have my way as long as I get my say." As a result of that decision, there have not been any significant negative repercussions within the district. In fact, no one left the district through open enrollment and three years later a bond issue which passed at an 80% margin in the entire district, passed in that community at 84%. "I give credit to the fact that we had taken and laid out the ethical way of doing that [closing the building], letting everyone's voices be heard." Another process leaders put into place involves hiring procedures. Seen by some as one of the most significant responsibilities of leadership, the hiring process has great leverage in shaping the principles of educational institutions. As another superintendent put it, "Who I hire is going to help mold the organization's moral purpose."

### *Accountability*

Being accountable by demonstrating conscientious stewardship to the resources for which one is responsible is another behavior rooted in ethics. "Having good stewardship over those resources and being accountable and transparent in how you use the resources" was particularly important to one leader whose educational organization serves thousands of individuals. Being accountable is not only germane to tangible resources. Accountability is also related to process, meaning "to be open and honest about how you are doing that [meeting expectations]".

Doing ethical work as an educational leader means to understand ethics within the context of education; to be firmly grounded, mentally and emotionally,

in one's moral value system; and to demonstrate decision-making and actions that are rooted in one's espoused moral values.

### *Supporting Ethical Leadership*

Among the leaders interviewed for this research, ethics is a principle that is deeply intertwined with the work that is undertaken. The concept of ethical work ranged from making one's behaviors and work processes explicitly open, to the idea that working to create the best possible learning conditions and outcomes for all learners is the most ethical aspect of our calling. Sometimes ethics involves a decision between a right and a wrong. But it is in the moment of making a choice between two possible "rights," in what has been earlier defined as an ethical dilemma, or in making decisions that have significant ramifications in the lives of others that the weight and challenge of ethical leadership are truly tested. What is it, then, that supports a leader to behave ethically and to have the fortitude to face the challenges and repercussions after having made difficult decisions based on what she or he believes was the ethical choice to make? This section will explore the supports leaders have cited that sustain and bolster their resolve to work in what Gardner et al. (2001) describe as a socially responsible manner.

### *External Supports*

In a very down-to-earth sense, expectations and employment themselves serve, perhaps not as supports, but more so as motivation to work and behave ethically. As one individual put it plainly, "I don't think you'd last a real long time if you were not ethical. You spend too much time covering your tracks and trying to

remember where you lied.” But aside from what might be described as motivation by fear, there are supports, external and internal, that strengthen and reinforce ethical leadership.

In one school rural school district, a relationship has been established between the school district and the local ministerial association. This relationship, which at the same time is cognizant of church and state separation issues, has allowed the school district to dialogue with faith leaders on issues, including those of moral underpinnings. One of the successes cited was that of a joint effort to develop eight character traits on which the ministerial association, school district, and community could whole-heartedly support. Over the course of numerous monthly meetings these eight traits were developed and have become the basis for character education in the schools and churches. “We have a strong partnership with our local ministerial association.” This partnership serves to support a set of common morals and values shared with the school, creating an unwritten expectation for the behaviors of leaders from both the religious community and school district. “So, we have great support from the ministerial association, and that carries through the community.” These beliefs create a foundation for the entire community.

External expectations and social norms may be unseen structures that guide the ethical behaviors of educational leaders. “One way [ethical behaviors are supported] is the state we live in. In Iowa, we’re of a little different mind set about what you and I are expected to do in this job.”

Those who have shown themselves to be ethical in their work can support others by serving as role models. "We have a certain role modeling that we are expected to do and I think that is good." As one individual put it when speaking of her responsibility to serve as a model for others, "I will inspire some of them, not all of them. I'll help them to understand they can do the same thing and then we can do it with colleagues. It's so generative."

By the very virtue of being licensed in Iowa, there is a code of ethics by which educators, including leaders, must abide. In this code of ethics, "leaders are licensed with ethical responsibilities laid out in rules for educational licensure." These ethical responsibilities create legal expectations regarding the behavior of all educators and put in the forefront values and morals regarding professional behavior that Iowans support. However, the impact of this code within professional licensure may have limited influence. Regarding this licensure issue one leader commented, "I'm not sure that's going to provide a lot of specific guidance."

Within some school districts board policy and administrative rules and regulations set forth processes aimed at protecting the district and its employees. In one particular district procedures for handling and processing financial transactions are clearly spelled out, in an attempt to never put anyone in a compromising situation that may cause behavior to be questioned. However, one might argue that such policies do not support moral or ethical behaviors. By taking the decision-making ability out of the hands of individuals, they are not called upon to exercise their own ethical decision making. At the same time,



however, it does force individuals to behave within the parameters of a certain code of behaviors. Making processes and procedures, such as the handling of money “transparent” and open can influence the ethical behavior of leaders. It may cause them to consider the potential ramifications if their observed behaviors do not align with expectations set forth by a given school district or organization.

In addition to structural “supports” there are other forms of external supports that assist leaders in their quest to do ethical work. Over the past year, School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) developed a pilot program for school leaders, entitled “Leading with Soul.” With the “increasing references to the issues surrounding moral leadership in the leadership literature” and the desire to “bring the most isolated, and often the most lonely, professionals” together in a collegial fashion this program created “a network where it is safe to share leadership dilemmas, a chance to get in the literature and talk about it with peers, and a chance to get ‘up close and personal’ with respected leaders who serve as resource persons to the project.” Evaluations from this project were “so very positive” that another session is beginning this year.

Some of the external supports, including the above mentioned tend to be more formal. They can be structurally foundational within an organization, they can be formal expectations springing forth from the community at large, or they can be opportunities supported by organizations such as School Administrators of Iowa. Other external supports, are more informal.

*Relationships.*

Essentially, the foundation of internal supports is based on personal relationships and communications. There are two aspects of these relationships that relate to ethical support. One of these is the personal relationships one develops with those they lead. "It is the personal relationships that you have developed, because I think if there is something there [unethical behaviors], that you could not go and face those people." When working in the highly visible profession of educational leadership daily interactions and associations with others is an absolute necessity. Because of those necessary interactions and the accountability that exists within the relationships, as one leader humorously put it, "You can't hide in your office." These relationships can also provide mutual support between leaders and those whom they lead. "It's reciprocal. If I learn about you, about your aspirations to become a better person, it inspires me too, to become a better person." The structure for relationship building a leader has created can also serve to support ethical behaviors. "It's creating organizations and being part of organizations, and I mean organizations in the broadest sense of the word, that provide mutual support."

Another side of relationships as supports for ethical behavior is that of peer relationships. In this profession, where the impact of the isolation and loneliness of the job have been made apparent, it is in the interactions between peers that empathic support can be provided. One superintendent shared how much he appreciated the support of the other superintendents in their conference. He appreciated how they welcomed him into the cadre when he

became superintendent and the relationships and support that have been cultivated ever since. As one individual stated, "I think the best support is collegial support." One person summed it up simply, "It's the relationship between people – what we give to each other" that supports ethical behaviors. *Communication.*

Communication serves as a medium to develop, deepen, and maintain relationships. "You do that [provide mutual support systems] through a lot of dialogue and conversation." At the same time communication can bolster ethics in its own right. Communication provides opportunities for individuals to dialogue about the topic of ethics itself. An executive director said that communication allows you to "keep bringing it [ethics] up in the conversation." In this way, "you allow voices to be heard and you listen closely." Listening, then, is an important skill in the communication process. "You have to be willing to listen, so that it really is a genuine relationship." If these conversations begin to go awry, it can be helpful refocus them through the context of what's most important. "...and you keep bringing kids into the conversation. Then you figure how to do what's right."

It may seem to be a simple thing to create these conversations that support ethics, for as one person put it, "it's just the fact that, you know, just go out and talk to people." Yet this seemingly simple endeavor has been shown to be very effective in spreading important ideas. "Now you see all the great spiritual leaders, and what they did was they went around and talked to people." Word of mouth, so it seems, is often the best way to spread ideas. Perhaps the effectiveness of this communication, spoken to by these individuals, owes part of

its success to the context the state Iowa provides. "We're [Iowa] small enough...people feel comfortable talking with each other."

External supports have been identified that sustain ethics. These influences came from outside each of these individuals. In other words, leaders are acted upon by these stimuli. However, several individuals spoke to the power of their own personal moral code, character, and belief systems.

*Integrated Character and Belief Systems.*

Among the individuals interviewed there were common character traits. All revealed a strong desire to provide the best educational opportunities for all students. This desire was realized through the strong work ethic each exhibited. Their sense of obligation to do excellent work, it seemed, was driven by a deep ethical responsibility to do so. For most, this ethical responsibility was not restricted to merely professional veracity. Rather the integration of ethics into one's whole life was clearly articulated by one individual. "We can't be an administrator during the day and do something else at night."

For several, the nature of education and educational leadership draws individuals to the profession with common ethical beliefs. "I just think we [educators] tend to be ethical people and we usually do the right things for people." There seems to be no question as to the motive of most educational leaders. As one leader put it, "people are in it for the right reasons; for what's best for kids."

The common character traits of these individuals were a result of well-rooted principles. Several people spoke of ethics as more or less an afterthought;

as though it was so much a part of who they were as people and such a fundamental aspect of their moral purpose that it was “a given.” It seemed that ethics was such a fundamental component of their being that it was almost as if they did not think about it at a conscious level. One person spoke as though not behaving ethically was not even a consideration for her. “I have to know that I’m being true to my ethics and my beliefs. So, for me, ‘ethical leadership’ is the only place I have.” Another supported this idea when she said, “I can’t imagine doing it any other way.”

For some, their internal compasses had been influenced by their faith life. Some spoke to a faith that guided their decisions and actions. This faith is expressed through servanthood and “a belief that all of us need to give back in some way.” One leader shared that “church was very important to me when I was growing and I still have a strong faith, and going to church is important.” Another demonstrated the influence of his faith life as an ethical guide in his decision making. “I have to make decisions which are ethically strong and I have to base those on something. Now, I happen to have a strong religious faith, which I don’t hide from anybody.” While these individuals were grounded in their faith and were influenced in their daily lives, they also made it clear that they did not push their beliefs onto others. It first and foremost served as moral anchor for their behavior.

While not all expressed being influenced by religious beliefs, others cited personal beliefs as being strong influences of their ethical orientation. “I think part of it is your own personal belief system. I have to tell you that the use of that

system for doing what is right is important.” For another, these fundamental core beliefs expose who we truly are and can be revealed under times of stress. “When the going gets tough, what emerges from you before you have time to think about it, is the real you.”

Finally, internal supports for ethical behavior were heavily influenced by upbringing, specifically by parents. Several individuals grew up on farms, where a strong work ethic and the importance of family were instilled. One individual cited his parents as excellent role models, who modeled the importance of a strong faith life. Another cited the influence of his father, who as a lawyer and district court judge encouraged discussions at home about ethics. One cited the influence of growing up in a family who had little in terms of possessions, but who were non-judgmental and never criticized others in front of her. Finally, one individual’s mother served as a state legislator. She was a person who “really believed one person could save the world.” She passed on the idea that an individual “has to go out and believe you can make a difference in the world,” indicating “how important it is to try and get into positions to help people.”

Supports for ethical work on the part of educational leaders in this study do exist with some having a long-lasting impact on individuals. Among this group of educational leaders, the desire and ability to engage in socially responsible work is supported externally by formal and informal structures and influences, and internally through common characteristics based on powerful belief systems and/or upbringing.

### *Challenges to Ethical Work*

Gardner et al. (2001) pointed out the challenges to doing good work in the fields of genetics and journalism. While the complexities of these challenges are often convoluted and complicated, one theme appeared to be foundational as a challenge to doing ethical work. Once journalism emerged from an environment where newspapers were owned by affluent families and moved into more of a market-driven business, and genetics began an evolution from the academic setting to the private sector where market share and profit are the bottom line, both have been, "unsettled by economic and political ties that both support and constrain them from the outside." Stated in perhaps over simplistic terms, both journalism and genetics have compromised some long-held values in their efforts to essentially earn a greater profit. While education in Iowa is currently not market-based, challenges to working ethically do exist for educational leaders.

#### *Political Accountability Structures*

Accountability structures are one challenge cited by educational leaders to doing ethical work. Education in Iowa and the entire country for the past several years has been moving to a climate of ever-grown expectations and accountability. The accountability movement seems to have culminated in federal legislation known as No Child Left Behind. Signed into law by President Bush in 2002, the intent of this law is "To close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (Public Law 107-110, 2002). None of the participants interviewed for this study had disagreement with the intent of the law. However, it is its implementation and the potential ethical

ramifications that are of concern. "Current pressures for improvement of test scores cause some people to move into areas that are probably gray areas of improving student performance and it has caused some people to move into areas that are not gray areas – they're black ones."

While Iowa cannot be said yet to be in a high stakes testing environment, NCLB is based on a punitive reward system. Being placed on a watch list, being cited as a failing school, or having funding jeopardized is causing some Iowa leaders to be concerned about the potential future temptations to do whatever might be necessary to avoid such sanctions. As one individual noted,

Well, one thing that we're being set up to have happen to us is how we possibly manipulate a system that is going to punish us if we don't make our goals for NCLB. All of us probably know administrators and teachers that have copies of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills tests who use those unethically, have shown them to the students, practiced the test questions, and maybe even people have changed the answers. We are not even at the situation yet, but one could be under intense pressure. We're just at the beginning and you know some of those things are going to happen. What's that going to be like? What kind of effect is that going to have on educational leaders? It's too early to tell, but I think it's going to have an effect and I don't think it's very positive.

Yet, it is not so much the thought of cheating that causes leaders their greatest consternation with NCLB. With its current focus in Iowa on reading and mathematics achievement, leaders expressed greater ethical concerns regarding



the potential for schools to narrow their curriculum to concentrate only on these two core areas. One leader shared, "I think the biggest ethical dilemma is to fall into the trap of focusing on the very narrow part of what I believe education is. It [NCLB] is important; but not the end all for education." Referring to its constricted focus, another leader revealed that NCLB is "just a manifestation of how we've narrowed what the purpose of school is." Responding to the attention placed on a schools performance relative to NCLB, one superintendent disclosed that "the desire out there to look good on paper, for me it would be unethical to forsake working with students in these other aspects, just to look good."

There are additional concerns related to NCLB. Focusing only on academic achievement raises concerns about meeting the holistic needs of children as individuals. A focus on math and reading concentrates on intellectual enhancement, ignoring the physical, emotional, aesthetic, and social development of children. As Iowa uses the benchmark of the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile as the cut-off point for determining proficiency, there are also concerns about the attention given to average as well as gifted students. Finally, one superintendent views NCLB as a reform effort that disregards efforts that have been made to reach the learners who face the greatest challenges in his school district. "The NCLB stuff, I think, is an applicable struggle that I have because I think it belittles the things that our special education teachers have done for years about giving kids the skills they need to survive."

NCLB, as one structure of accountability is beginning to create pressure for educational leaders in Iowa. This intense pressure, as one individual put it, "is

going to cause people to be less ethical than they have been.” I wish to emphasize that all of the leaders I interviewed believed strongly in accountability regarding student achievement. Their concerns were based on the implementation of NCLB, given the statistical challenges it presents to meet goals and the punitive actions that can occur to further challenge schools to meet student needs.

### *Finances*

The financial condition of the state of Iowa and its impact on schools was cited as a condition that could challenge ethical conduct. It is not the impact of that money as it personally relates to leaders, for as one leader shared, “I don’t believe any of us are after money. If we would have chosen money we would have been in some other business.” Rather, it is the impact of declining budgets and its bearing on students that causes the greatest concern. “One of the things that challenge ethics, I think right now, is the limited budget. We’re going to have to make some very, very difficult decisions, and it’s going to be real tempting to make decisions that are easy, or appear to be easy. If we don’t struggle with the ethics of, not only how we do the process, but also the decisions we make, I think we may cripple some kids down the road and take away some opportunities for them.”

This lack of financial resources are “putting some pretty real pressures on school districts,” according to one executive leader. Real examples of limited finances come forth for contemplation. “If you don’t have the money to hire the people who don’t have exactly the right license to do really what your kids need,

what are you going to do? When is that move into the gray area acceptable and when do you just simply rationalize it?" While districts will be the recipients of these reductions, it is the leaders who are left to struggle with them. "I am concerned about, in some of our districts where there are some very limited resources, what our leaders are able to do."

Some advocate that if schools were run more like businesses, they would be able to meet demands in a fiscally responsible manner. However, one leader shared an opposing view.

We're not in the product business. We're in the production business. What we're trying to do is deliver a product which can enrich our communities, both economically and civically. So, we're not in the same business, yet we get this incredible pressure and it comes in all types of forms. It comes in vouchers...all of this relates to money, and it tests the hell out of us. There's no doubt about it.

As the condition of economics in the state of Iowa continues to be challenged, so may the ethics of financial decision making.

### *Miscellaneous Challenges*

A number of other challenges with less systemic impact were identified by leaders. For one, job stress, related to the many pressures and expectations of educational leadership has the potential to create difficulties for leaders. "I've seen more problems result from the stress created by the job for educational leaders than anything else," cited one superintendent.

As ethicists have wrestled with, the struggle to determine the greater good and act upon it challenges leaders as well. One superintendent shared an example from his district in which a young teacher and coach was convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol. What made the circumstance more difficult was that this particular coach also served as a DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) role model. Given the inherent expectations for this person, it may have seemed most appropriate to terminate the employment of this individual. However, the superintendent saw a greater good at play in this situation. This greater good was the opportunity to turn this into a learning opportunity for both employee and students as well. By his own volition the coach developed his own consequences that were similar to those imposed on athletes when in violation of the student conduct code, including being suspended from his athletic team for 10% of the season. In addition, to further demonstrate his regret he wrote letters of apology to students, athletes, parents, and members of the school board. The superintendent wanted to respond appropriately to this incident to send a message to the public that it was an important issue. At the same time he also “wanted to do the right thing, in showing as a district we were helping him through a process” leading to his self-imposed consequences, supported by the superintendent. This example demonstrates the struggle educational leaders may face to sort out the multiple “rights” that can exist in any situation.

Finally, the personal behaviors of leaders can create ethical challenges as well. However, through the development of what one leader described as

"normative value structures" within the organization, ethically challenging personal behaviors can be minimized.

How do educational leaders in Iowa measure up to the challenges of behaving ethically? Responses of those interviewed revealed minimal concern over personal behaviors and greater concern regarding educational and financial issues. As one former superintendent put it, "I actually don't think we do too bad if you think about ethics based on the Boy Scout model. If we try to relate that [ethics] to excellence; and when I relate it to excellence it means the outcome at school, I think we do less well."

### *Good Work in the Future*

Through this research the two aspects of good work, excellence and ethics, have been examined and discussed. Through the investigation the current condition of good work among educational leaders in Iowa has been examined and described. But as Stephen Covey (1989) has said, "that which lies behind us is nothing compared to that which lies in front of us." In other words, as we examine the current state of affairs I believe we need to simultaneously consider the future work of educational leadership.

What does the future of doing good work in educational leadership hold? As discussed earlier in this paper, there are current challenges to doing quality work in socially responsible ways. In addition to those challenges cited earlier, leaders in their discussion of the future of good work in educational leadership identified additional concerns for the future of education and educational leadership.

There have been and always will be the pressures of external demands on educational leaders. One individual expressed the concern that he did not want leaders to be “stifled or discouraged by so many external demands.” Another expressed the concern that as No Child Left Behind (2002) plays out into the future there may be fallout if schools are not able to meet standards that have been created. “Are we going to be able to continue the good things we do for kids when people are going to lose confidence in us? I’m a little bit worried about that and how that is going to play out.” Other future concerns included several potential “bumps,” such as a shortage of quality educational leaders, due to a “shallow pool of candidates;” the increasing complexity of the role of educational leader; and a lingering question as to whether the system as we know it will adequately support the professional development of leaders.

It is relatively easy to select a current newspaper or educational journal and find these and other challenges facing education, and consequently educational leaders. However, despite the obstacles identified to providing ethical, quality leadership, there is an even greater sense of optimism for the future among those leaders who were members of this research project. While the levels of optimism ranged from one individual being “cautiously optimistic” to another who believed educational leadership in Iowa had a “very bright future,” every single interviewee in this study spoke words of optimism about the future of good work in educational leadership, with most of the remarks favoring the more optimistic end of the spectrum.

Despite the challenges, educational leadership is seen as a “good profession,” made up of good people working to do the right things for children. At its most fundamental level, perhaps the strongest theme that came from the entire study was the personal and professional qualities of those currently serving in educational leadership positions. The strength of these individuals and the work they have done have helped to create this sense of hopefulness.

While Sergiovanni (1992), who cited earlier in this work, has offered that more is written and less is known about leadership than any other field, research continues on to further develop our understanding of leadership, particularly as it pertains to education. Through the writings of thinkers, researchers, and authors such as Michael Fullan, Warren Bennis, Thomas Sergiovanni, Ronald Heifetz, and Marty Linsky; leaders are able to deepen their understanding of leadership and develop knowledge and skills to become more effective in their roles. One leader from this study who said that “we’re doing ok and we’re getting better,” believed this growth was leading to what he referred to as an “intellectual and perhaps spiritual evolution.”

Fortunately there is also support for this growth and development beyond the writings of leadership experts. This support comes in the form of various organizations which specifically support the development of educational leadership. On a national level these organizations include, among others the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and the Association for Supervision and

Curriculum Development (ASCD). However, there also exist organizations on a state level that support the work of educational leaders. One of those organizations mentioned various times throughout these interviews was School Administrators of Iowa. This organization's mission is to serve the needs of educational leaders throughout the state of Iowa. This vision and support by writers and professional organizations is reason optimism rings clearly for the future of educational leadership.

The support for education within the state of Iowa is another reason identified for being optimistic about the future of educational leadership. Historically, Iowa and Iowans have been strong supporters for quality education. As one individual put it, "In Iowa there is a profound respect for the value of education." Iowans, according to another, understand that quality education develops the intellectual capital of our state, and comprehend the impact of this intellectual capital on our state's economy and quality of life. Additionally, Iowa, unlike other states, is not currently subject to "high stakes testing," which many feel have compromised the integrity of education in other states. These conditions germane to Iowa also generate hope and assurance regarding the future of educational leadership in Iowa.

Juxtaposition is the quality of being able to see something from a different perspective. This is a quality held by the subjects in this study and is demonstrated by their ability to not only see the current reality of a situation, but also to see the possibilities that exist therein. As one superintendent put it, "Yeah, there's a lot of doom and gloom. There's a lot of people that would preach



that the sky is falling. Well, I think every one of those doom and gloom things offers an opportunity for us. I think we're doing a better job right now in this country of educating every child than we've ever done before...we've got to celebrate the victories to make it more public."

While being faced with ever-changing challenges, strong optimism exists among educational leaders for the future of good work in educational leadership in Iowa. While external conditions have been cited to support this hope, it is the quality, both in excellence and ethics, of the people themselves who choose to devote their lives to the education of children that creates the greatest leverage for encouraging this hopeful enthusiasm. As has been shared by many of those interviewed, good people for the right reasons have dedicated their lives to serve as educational leaders for the children of this state. With a moral purpose as a foundation and supports to sustain and encourage, new leaders will emerge and join with current leaders to tackle the challenges that lie ahead for education. It is only with this type of dedicated leadership, focused on doing quality work in a socially responsible manner that education will continue to thrive in the state of Iowa.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND FURTHER THOUGHTS

#### *Summary*

As an extension of the research from *Good Work* (2001), which studied the history and current status of high quality, socially responsible work in genetics and journalism, the purpose of this study has been to create an understanding of the current state of “good work” in educational leadership in Iowa.

The study was guided by the broad question of what it means to carry out “good work” in the professional realm of educational leadership in Iowa. It was specifically guided by seven subquestions which served as the basis for the interview protocol that was developed.

Doing excellent work meant several things to the educational leaders interviewed in this study. It meant developing positive and mutually beneficial relationships within and outside of one’s organization. Excellence was a function of effective leadership which included providing direction, empowering others, developing appropriate decision making processes, the ability to work with complexity, facilitating change, and consistency. Finally, in doing excellent work leaders concentrated on student needs and achievement.

All of the leaders agreed that supporting excellent work on the part of leaders was an absolute necessity. Numerous types of supports existed, including organizational structures, professional development, positive interpersonal relationships, and the inspiration of influential individuals. However,

it should also be noted that while supports for doing excellent work exists, there remains a continuing need to provide additional supports as the demands upon educational leaders increase and intensify.

Challenges to doing excellent work certainly exist in educational leadership. The limits of time and finances, politics and mandates, systemic, and societal changes confront and put to the test a leader's capacity to carry out quality work.

Ethical work for the leaders in this study was guided by a fundamental moral purpose. This moral purpose influenced their decision making, caused them to make processes transparent to stakeholders, encouraged them to support the good work of others, and held them to high degrees of accountability.

Supports for ethical work were influenced by social norms, values, and expectations of the communities (used in the broadest sense) they served. Leaders' ethical work was sustained by strong relationships, communication, family and childhood influences, and their own personal belief systems.

Even with the best of intention and support, challenges to a leader's ethical behaviors are present. The current and ever growing political accountability structures including the influence of No Child Left Behind (2002), a subtle but growing shift into a market based educational environment, job stress, and a continual struggle to determine and act on "the greater good" confront leaders and test their fortitude to work ethically on a daily basis.

Despite the many growing challenges educational leaders must effectively confront and a concern regarding the depth of a quality pool of potential leaders,

the outlook for doing good work among educational leaders is positive. Fundamentally, those who choose education and educational leadership do so for a greater good; to make a positive difference in the lives of children, subsequently shaping the future of our society. With this purpose as its foundation and with more dedicated and moral individuals to follow the current leaders, those interviewed in this study believe the future for doing good work in educational leadership is a very bright one.

### *Conclusions*

At the end of this research I have come to a few conclusions. First, excellence is not an end state in itself. While there are means to determine the quality of one's works, excellence is a process whereby individuals are on a path of continuous improvement. Much in the same way Frankl (1962) speaks of the attainment of success, excellence is based on an individual's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself. In other words, excellence is a journey, not a destination.

The second conclusion I have reached following extensive reading and the analysis of interviews conducted is that excellence and ethics are intertwined in a synergistic realm of existence. The concurrence of excellence and ethics suggests they have mutually evolved, and as a result their interaction with one another has a greater effect than the sum total of their individual effects. In other words, the term "good work" encapsulates a fundamental concept that has resulted from intermingling the essence of ethics and excellence. Fundamentally, "good work" in educational leadership requires both excellent and ethical work.

### *Further Thoughts/Future Considerations*

Because “the undiluted pressure for profits threatens to trivialize other domains” (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 231), doing “good work” requires educational leaders to be grounded in the fundamental moral belief regarding the need for and power of quality education for all children. As a driving force, this belief intrinsically compels leaders to engage in quality, socially responsible work. This internal commitment appears to provide leaders the resolve to resist those external factors that might challenge their efforts.

At the most basic level, leaders as well as all other individuals, according to Victor Frankl (1962), possess the last and perhaps most fundamental human freedom; the freedom to choose their response in any situation. Based on this premise and in the context of the fundamental moral purpose held dearly by educators, it seems that educational leaders may indeed possess a certain level of immunity to the external forces that have been shown to threaten journalist and geneticists as described in *Good Work*. One might wonder, however, if educational leaders are currently able to withstand such forces, not only due to their moral purpose, but also because the forces themselves neither threaten nor create high enough stakes to place leaders in what might be considered ethically challenging situations.

The current state of “good work” in journalism, according to Gardner et al. (2001), is questionable as a result of its existence in a market driven atmosphere. Similarly, much as genetics faces its own challenges to “good work” as it enters the fledgling stages of transition from the world of academia to that of ownership

by multi-national profit seeking corporations, education may now stand at the juncture of experiencing a market based environment as a way of life.

Educational leaders may need to heed the warning bell rung by journalism and genetics, lest they fall victim to the earlier described consequences in the parable of the boiled frog. Surfaced by dynamically complex forces, there are both subtle and not-so-subtle signs signaling the possibility that education in Iowa and the entire nation is entering a market based domain; and once that occurs, it may not be possible to make its way out. In our digital information age, intellectual capital now seems to be a high leverage commodity that wields a high price. According to Gardner et al. (2001), "the eruption of privately funded schools for kindergarten through twelfth grade has heralded the 'marketization' of young people's minds" (p. 229). The potential systemic impact on the public educational system as we know it by movements such as No Child Left Behind, open enrollment, and educational vouchers may signal the beginning of a shift toward this consumer driven education market. If this is truly the beginning of a trend whose outcome is inevitable, resulting in a free-market educational economy in which schools compete against one another for customers and a greater market share, will educational leaders be susceptible to the same forces that have compromised the "good work" of journalist and geneticists?

Given the foundation of moral perpetuity among public educational leaders, it may be necessary for them to wage a political battle to prevent such an occurrence, preserving the purity, clarity, purpose, and promise that public education holds for all citizens. If unsuccessful, they may need to prepare for the

unavoidable evolution into a market based environment, and the subsequent challenges it may present for them to carry out "good work."

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A  
Participant Consent Form

(Date)

Dear (Name):

I am currently working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. As a research topic I have chosen to extend the work of Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon in their book entitled *Good Work*, and study how educational leaders in Iowa “do top quality, socially responsible work at a time of extremely rapid change” (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001, p. ix).

In this qualitative study, as I seek to understand the state of “good work” in educational leadership, I will be relying on data collected through individual interviews (each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes) with selected educational leaders in Iowa. You have been identified, as the result of a collaborative identification process involving Dr. Troyce Fisher, Executive Director School Administrators of Iowa, as an outstanding educational leader in the state of Iowa. The intent of this letter is to seek your permission as a participant in the study.

Your responses, along with an evolving literature review, will help to gain an insight into how educational leaders do “good work” in Iowa. As you may be aware, in order to use the data you provide for my research and any subsequent publications in which this research might appear, I need your consent to

participate in the study. My goal is to report the findings through a "thick and rich" narrative text, following an extensive analysis of the interview data. To that end individual thoughts and quotes may be included to highlight and provide specific references to give fuller, more personalized insight to the text. To this end, I also request your preference as to whether you may be quoted directly or wish to remain anonymous. Please know, as a tenet of ethical research, I will respect whatever choice you make. Please know if you feel you need to withdraw from this study, you are free to do so at any time and any data collected from your interview will not be included in the study.

Thank you so very much for your consideration to participate in this study. Please complete the consent form on the second page and return it to me in the envelope provided by May 15, 2004.

Sincerely,

G. Douglas Stilwell, Ed. S.

Doctoral Candidate

Drake University

Dr Sally Beisser, Ph.D.

Dissertation Chairperson

Drake University

**Consent to Participate**

- ☐ I give my consent to participate in an interview for this study
- ☐ I do not give my consent to participate in an interview for this study

**Consent to quote or cite directly**

- ☐ I give my consent to be quoted or cited directly in this study
- ☐ I give my consent to be quoted or cited directly but wish to remain anonymous

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date



## Appendix B

### Final Interview Questions

#### A Study of the Condition of "Good Work" in Educational Leadership in Iowa

#### Research Questions

Thank you for participating in this research study regarding the state of "good work" (excellence and ethics) in educational leadership in Iowa. Following are the major questions I will be asking during our interview. There may be follow-up questions as needed. Please know that I will begin the interview asking for a brief biography of your life.

1. What does it mean to do excellent work as an educational leader?
  - What are some things you are trying to accomplish in your work right now?
  - What about your work gives it meaning and makes it worthwhile?
  - What changes in educational leadership have affected your work, either for better or worse?
2. How is excellence encouraged and supported in educational leadership?
  - What are some things that have helped you to achieve your goals?
  - What kind of work is rewarded in educational leadership?
  - Who has had the greatest influence on your approach to work and/or how you made crucial decisions in your career?
  - Mentors?
3. What challenges a leader's ability to engage in excellent work?
  - How have these challenges impacted your work?
  - What are the biggest pressures you face in your work?
  - What about external/internal forces?
  - Any anti-mentors?
4. What does it mean to do ethical work as an educational leader?
  - Do you have any ethical concerns/questions about education? What are they?
5. How is ethical work encouraged and supported?
6. What issues or circumstances challenge the ethical behaviors of

educational leaders?

- Internal/External

7. What does the future hold for good work in educational leadership?

## Appendix C

### Original Interview Protocol

Adapted from *Good Work* (2001) Appendices C and D (p. 263-271)

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee

Interviewer:

Date:

Place:

#### Opening/Introduction

1. What kinds of things are you trying to accomplish in your work right now?
2. Is there a goal in your work that gives meaning to what you do that is essential to making your work worthwhile?
3. What attracted you initially to educational leadership?
  - a. Is that still what appeals to you?
  - b. If you hadn't become involved in educational leadership, what might you be doing instead?

4. What do you like about your work? Dislike?

#### Conditions of the Field: Past/Present/Future

5. Which of the many changes in educational leadership have affected your experience of your work, either for better or worse?

- a. If you were in a position of higher authority, how would you do things differently?
  - b. Thinking about work you respect, what are the common denominators? Common denominators of work you don't respect?
6. What direction do you see for the future of educational leadership?
- a. Under what circumstances would this cease to be exciting for you?

#### Beliefs and Values

7. What would you say are any personal beliefs or core values that guide your work?
- a. What experiences or influences were most important in forming those beliefs?
8. Are these values the same or different than the values of colleagues and others in your field?
- a. (if in conflict) What effect does this have, if any, on the pursuit of your goals?
  - b. Would it (degree of consistency) be different if you were working on your own or in another organization?
  - c. What about if you were working in a different (business/commercial) setting?

#### Goals and Responsibilities

9. In your life's work, is there an over-arching purpose or goal that gives meaning to what you do that is essential to making your work worthwhile? What is it?
10. How does this connect to your day-to-day work?
11. Are there certain tactics or techniques that have helped you achieve your goals in your day-to-day work?
12. In what ways do reflection/contemplative practices help you in your decision-making?
13. What experiences or influences were most important in forming this goal?
14. How do you know whether you're on-track/making progress toward this goal?

#### The Work Process (Personal Level)

15. What of your work are you most proud?
16. To what do you attribute your success in this endeavor?
17. How important is creativity for your work?
18. What qualities are instrumental to your creative process?
19. What role does reflection play in your creative process?
20. Is it necessary to take risks?

#### Opportunities and Supports

21. What are some of the things that have helped you reach your goals?
22. Are there specific qualities that have contributed to your achievements?

- a. What about qualities that have held you back or made it harder to pursue your goals?

#### Obstacles, Pressures, and Rewards

23. What reasons make it difficult to achieve your goals? What are the biggest pressures that you face, where you work?

- a. What external difficulties come from "outsiders" (such as government)
- b. What difficulties come from colleagues or your institution?
- c. What are the challenges of balancing your work and private life?

24. How do you go about dealing with these difficulties and pressures?

25. What is your work environment generally like? Is it generally supportive or constraining?

26. In your institution, what kind of work is rewarded?

#### Formative Background

27. Reflecting on your youth, what were the salient influences on your broader professional goals and the way you approach your work?

- a. How has your family background influenced the way you approach your work?
- b. How did you spend time as a child? What would a person have seen if they shadowed you for a day when you were a child?
- c. As a child, were you intensely involved in one or more activities? Which ones?

28. Who has had the greatest influence on your approach to work and/or how you made crucial decisions in your career?

- a. Would you consider any of them mentors? What did you learn from them?
- b. Any "anti-mentors?" How did they affect you?
- c. Any influential books or someone you did not know personally?
- d. Any experiences, opportunities, or projects that was transformational?

#### Training the Next Generation

29. What's important for you to transmit to young people through words or deeds?

30. How well does education train young people to have the qualities that you think are important? How would you train them differently?

- a. How would you advise a young person who is thinking about a career in educational leadership?

#### Ethical Issues in the Area of Work

31. Do you have ethical concerns/issues about education – things that you worry about? What are they?

- a. How do they impact education and your work?

32. Are your concerns shared by others in education? Outside education?

33. How would you like to see them handled?

#### Closing

34. How do you spend most of your time at work?

35. What was your training like – formal and on the job training?



## Appendix D

*Table D1.*

## Original Research Question/Original Interview Question Matrix

Research Questions	Original Interview Questions
What does it mean to carry out "good work" in the professional realm of educational leadership today?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5a, 5b, 6, 6a, 7, 7a, 8, 8a, 8b, 8c, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 22a, 23, 23a, 23b, 23c, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 30a, 31, 31a, 32, 33, 34, 35
What is "good work" in educational leadership?	5a, 5b, 6a, 7, 7a, 8, 8a, 8b, 8c, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 26, 28, 28a, 28c, 28d, 31, 31a, 32, 33
What does it mean to do excellent work as an educational leader?	1, 2, 5, 5a, 5b, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 22a, 23, 23a, 23b, 25, 26, 29, 30, 30a
What does the future hold for good work in educational leadership?	5, 5a, 5b, 6, 7, 7a, 8, 8a, 9, 10, 29, 30, 30a, 31, 31a
How is excellence encouraged and supported in educational leadership?	4, 21, 22, 22a, 25, 26, 28, 28a, 28c, 29, 30, 30a, 35
What challenges a leader's ability to engage in excellent work?	2, 5, 6, 23, 23a, 23b, 23c, 25, 28b

*Table D1. (continued)**Original Research Question/Original Interview Question Matrix*

Research Questions	Original Interview Questions
How is ethical work encouraged and supported?	1, 2, 4, 7, 7a, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 21, 22, 29
What issues or circumstances challenge the ethical behaviors of educational leaders?	2, 5, 5a, 5b, 7, 8, 8a, 8b, 8c, 9, 10, 23, 23a, 23b, 23c, 27, 27a, 28, 28b, 28c, 28d, 31, 31a

Appendix E  
DRAKE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD REVIEW  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S PROJECT OUTLINE FORM

Name of Principal Investigator: Doug Stilwell

Department: Educational Leadership

Title of Proposed Project: A Study of the Condition of "Good Work" in Educational Leadership in Iowa

Proposed Starting Date: April 26, 2004      Duration: Six Weeks

Estimated Number of Human Subjects Involved in Project: Ten selected educational leaders from the state of Iowa.

I. Characteristics of Subjects (check as many boxes as appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Minors University	<input type="checkbox"/> Disabled	<input type="checkbox"/> Students
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults Secondary School	<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant	<input type="checkbox"/> Pupils
<input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners Elementary School	<input type="checkbox"/> Legally Incompetent	<input type="checkbox"/> Pupils
<input type="checkbox"/> Others (specify) _____		

II. Consent and Withdrawal Procedures, Notification of Results

A. Consent obtained from: ☒ Individual ☐ Institution  
☐ Parent/Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Specify)

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B. Type of Consent: ☒ Written (**attach copy of consent statement**)

**See "Participant Consent Form" in Appendix A**

\_\_\_\_\_ Oral (attach explanation for not using written consent and attach a verbatim statement of the oral instructions to the subject.)

C. Subjects are informed of withdrawal privileges (attach copy of consent statement).

D. Subjects notified of results: ☒ Mail (if desired) \_\_\_\_\_ Individual Consultation \_\_\_\_\_ Group Meetings

**Use additional sheets to respond to each of the remaining portions of this form.**

III. Risks: Briefly describe the risks (physical, psychological, social) to the subjects, and indicate the degree of risk involved in each case.

I believe there is minimal risk to the subjects involved in this research. Those risks could potentially include accidental public exposure of research subjects' identities, misuse of information, misunderstanding on the part of the researcher, misquoting in summary, and incorrect and/or unfitting analysis of the data. The research is seeking to understand the condition of the state of "good work" (defined as doing quality work in a socially responsible manner) in educational leadership in Iowa. Once they agree to participate, the participants will also consent to be quoted or cited directly, or to remain anonymous. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time and data collected from them will be destroyed.

IV. Benefits: Briefly describe the benefits (physical, psychological, social) to the subjects and/or society in general.

The authors of the book, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* (2001) after which this study is modeled, felt it significant to explore and understand what it means to do "quality, socially responsible work at a time of extremely rapid change" (p. ix). This search is equally important to the field of educational leadership as it is to genetics and journalism for, as the authors state, "...we are convinced that the challenge of 'good work' confronts every professional today" (p. ix). Educational leaders exercise a great deal of leverage in the lives of millions of children on a daily basis. Understanding the condition of "good work" will provide a clearer picture of the challenges and supports that impact a leader's ability to carry out "work of expert quality that benefits the broader society" (p. ix).

V. Methodology/Procedures

A. Briefly describe the methods used for selection of subjects/participants.

I will work with School Administrators of Iowa to identify ten educators who are recognized as quality leaders in the state of Iowa.

B. Briefly describe all other procedures to be followed in carrying out the project.

Once the IRB has approved the study, I will meet with School Administrators of Iowa to identify ten educational leaders in Iowa. Following that selection, a cover letter and participant consent form will be sent to each

individual to request their permission to participate in the study. Upon receipt of the consent forms, each participant will be contacted by phone to schedule a personal interview. Each interview is scheduled to last between 60-90 minutes, utilizing eight "grand tour" questions and numerous follow-up subquestions as needed for clarification and depth. Questions, developed from those utilized by the *Good Work* researchers, will be sent to each participant prior to the personal interview. Each interview will be recorded on an audio tape recorder, with each interviewee's identity kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms and an alpha-numeric coding system utilized for each interview tape. After the data has been collected, the interviews will be transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist, who will be made aware of the confidential nature of the interviews and, upon completion of the transcription process, will subsequently return all audio tapes, provide transcribed interview files (each of which will be encrypted with password protection), and delete all electronic interview files in her possession. Each participant will be sent a copy of his or her transcript for final approval. Upon final approval, the data will be analyzed, coded and sorted into themes. Following the coding a deeper level of analysis will occur. A literature review, focusing on themes and main ideas that have surfaced will take place following data analysis. These data collection and analysis procedures will be followed by the completion of a rough draft of the dissertation, leading ultimately to the writing of the final copy for defense.

C. Attach a copy of orientation information to subjects. Include questionnaires, interview questions, tests, and other similar materials.

### **See Appendices A and B**

VI. Check list. Submit three copies of the proposal you are filing. Each proposal should consist of the "HSRR Cover Form," and the "HSRR Project Outline Forms" with additional sheets and attachments as indicated (including any prospectus materials). Additionally, two copies of the "HSRR Final Notification Form" should be submitted.

VII. Agreements: By signing this form, the principal investigator agrees to the following:

A. To conform to the policies, principles, procedures, and guidelines established by the Drake Committee on Human Subjects Research.

B. To supply the committee with documentation of subject selection procedures and informed consent procedures.

C. To inform the committee of any changes in procedures which involve human subjects, giving sufficient time to review such changes before they are implemented.

D. To provide the committee with any progress reports it may request.

E. To obtain appropriate clearance or written permission from other institutions or agencies involved in the research. Such documentation should be filed with the HSRR.

F. The signature of the faculty advisor is required for all student research.

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Signature of Primary Investigator

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Date

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Signature of Faculty Advisor

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Date